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Nintendo 64
Perfect Dark: the sequel to GoldenEye, Jet Force Gemini, Vigilante 8

Dreamcast
Hydro Thunder, Blitz 2000, Ecco the Dolphin, Toy Commander

PlayStation
Jet Moto 3, Die Hard Trilogy 2, Army Men Air Attack

PC
The Sims, Soldier of Fortune, Battlezone II, Fear Factor, Evolva, Genesis: Aperian 7

AFRAID OF THE DARK

The 1999 holiday season is shaping up to be one of the most fiercely competitive this industry has ever seen. Sony's PlayStation, while aging, is quickly reaching the largest installed base in history, as is a slew of titles based on popular series. Case in point: Capcom's *Resident Evil*, which drove hardware sales through the roof in 1996, and which shows no signs of either creative or commercial slowdown with its third installment, is sure to bring the thrill of fear into your home once again. For the full story, see page 28.

Nintendo's equally aging Nintendo 64 doesn't have an obvious flagship title on the order of *Zelda* this year, but that doesn't leave it unarmed either. Second-party powerhouse Rare is supplying three new games — *Jet Force Gemini*, *Donkey Kong 64*, and the hotly anticipated unofficial sequel to *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark*. It remains to be seen whether *DK 64* will be "hotter than *Zelda*," as Nintendo claims, but you can judge for yourself. A complete look inside Rare begins on page 22.

Which leaves Sega. You may notice there's no separate Dreamcast section this month, and for good reason. Dreamcast has arrived — in spirit, if not in fact — and it continues to impress as the most exciting system currently available. Check our coverage of *Blitz 2000*, *Ecco the Dolphin*, *Vigilante 8*, *Toy Commander*, *Hydro Thunder*, and what is turning out to be the surprise hit of Dreamcast's early lineup, the fast (and funny) *Ready 2 Rumble*. Alphas begin on page 27.

AUGUST 1999

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Next month: look for interesting things here. It will be super cool, even if it kills the editors to do it. Highlights from the past five years: Chris Anderson calling Neil and getting Neil's voicemail imitation of, well, Chris Anderson; Trent lining up tic-tacs over his F-keys so he had fresh breath every hour on the hour; Neil's ME motivation techniques; Doug passing out dollar bills to "the needy" in the Tenderloin from his limo; Tom leaping through a window screen in the ultimate stunt; Haystack's face-plant in birthday cake; Chris' watermelon bomb off Simon's balcony; 24 hours of Lexicon; CalvinplayinghellaQuake; chair throwing; Tom 'n' Chris putting the diving well buoys in the fish pond; Mike's mad screenshot abilities; Mike writing Blitz during working hours; deleting people who work at Imagine so we can fit smarmy comments in the masthead, etc.

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NEXT GENERATION

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RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS

Few games have helped propel PlayStation's drive to market dominance the way Capcom's *Resident Evil* series has. The original was the console's first breakout hit (selling upward of 6 million copies), and its sequel garnered similar sales and a lot of TV commercial time. But as the hardware ages and the series moves into its third incarnation, can it still compete? Judge for yourself

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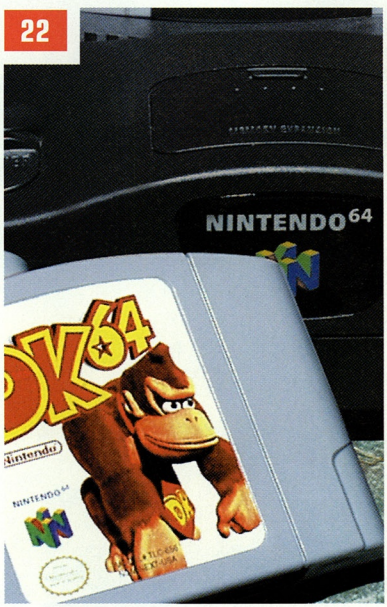

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Nintendo's second-party powerhouse is gearing up for a major holiday season with *Jet Force Gemini*, *Donkey Kong 64*, and the unofficial sequel to *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark*

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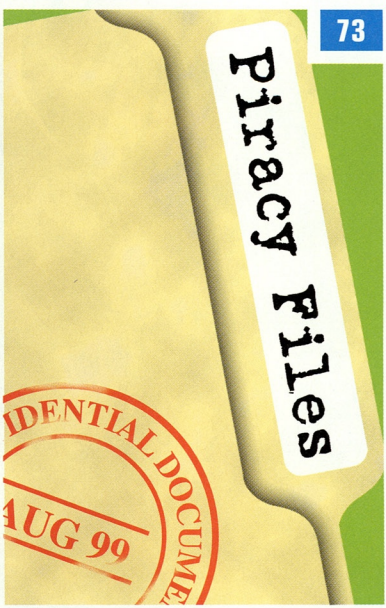

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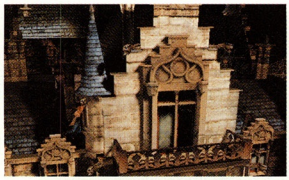

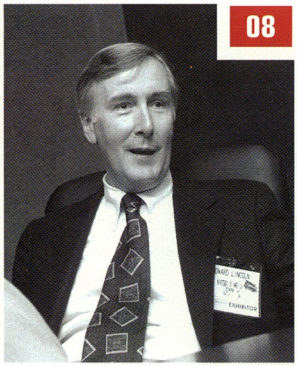

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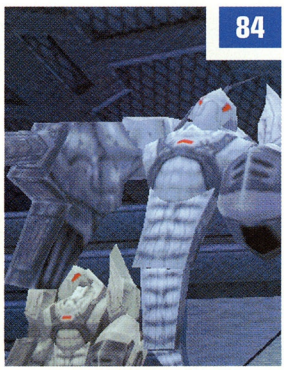

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The industry is facing **great change** and **greater acceptance**. Meanwhile, **Nintendo plans its next system**

INTELLIGENCE

Game industry news and analysis

GEARING UP FOR THE MASSES

The game industry is courting the mass market, but does that mean **the end of the game world as we know it?**

INFOGRAMES

Simply put, video and computer games are more popular now than at any time in history, and the trend shows no sign of stopping. As the industry moves firmly into the next generation, companies great and small are coming to expect massive profits and, what's more, the kind of mass audiences enjoyed by other entertainment media like film and television. However, to achieve these ends, publishers will have to provide the kind of content that tens of millions of people will find appealing, and as the industry becomes increasingly wowed by looming profits, will it abandon the kind of games that hardcore gamers love?

French publisher Infogrames is gearing its entire strategy toward the growing mass-market acceptance of games. President and CEO of Infogrames Entertainment Bruno Bonnell anticipates that PlayStation 2 will be the first console to reach an installed base of 100 million, with Nintendo's Dolphin reaching 55–60 million.

Infogrames, until now known for its PC titles, particularly the *Alone in the Dark* series, will now be focused almost entirely on console titles. To further this goal, it recently snapped up Accolade (and made Accolade CEO Jim Barnett the CEO of Infogrames North America), a company that has achieved no small success on PlayStation with its *Test Drive* franchise.

Barnett describes his company's future as publishing "global, mass market digital entertainment," further defined by Bonnell as "entertainment on every single platform you can imagine. Mobile phones, watches, planes, PC, online..."

Exactly what sort of titles will appeal to the mass market, however, no one is clear on. For its part, Infogrames will continue to publish some of its old-school titles, with *Alone in the Dark 4* in development now for multiple platforms,

Will the current drive to capture mass-market success spell the end of hardcore games like Accolade's *Slave Zero* [above] or Infogrames' *Outcast* [right]? Perhaps, but then again, perhaps not

and titles like *Outcast* and *Slave Zero* appealing to the hardcore gamer. The company is also hoping to grow the success of its *Mission: Impossible* and *Test Drive* franchises to reach massive audiences (with both franchises having already exceeded a million units).

"It's go big or go home," Barnett says, to which Bonnell adds, "There won't be room for small players."

Infogrames is not alone in its drive to reach the masses, with THQ recently announcing a slate of titles all clearly targeted at non-traditional game players. With *MTV Extreme Sports*, WWF, and rodeo titles all on the way, THQ feels it has established a "mass-market strategy," according to Vice President of Marketing Joseph Adney III.

Which is exactly the problem, of course: "mass market" is traditionally associated with titles like THQ's wrestling games or Infogrames' *Mission: Impossible*. In short, licensed and bland. With more companies coming to the conclusion that such games are required for survival, it might mean the end to complex, challenging, gamers' games.

On the other hand, not necessarily. True, over the past several years developers getting their toes wet in the mass-market pond have tried to make games that appeal to both the hardcore and the mythical mass consumer, usually by slapping on a recognizable license or dumbing down the gameplay. However, what is now developing is a firm division between "mass" products and "hardcore" products, which has freed up some developers to explore particularly complex ideas. Despite its mass-market mission, Infogrames hasn't abandoned titles like *Slave Zero*, a promising sign.

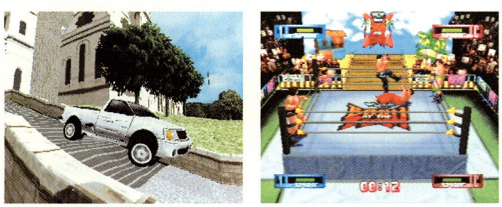
It can do this because the game market, like any other, is a pyramid. As millions gobble up the flashy-but-simple wrestling titles, some percent of those gamers will become interested in more complicated games, and some percent of that group will look for games even more complex than those, and so on. As the mass market grows, so will the number of hardcore gamers.

Infogrames may be aiming for mass-market success by furthering series like *Mission: Impossible* [above], but its continued development of *Alone in the Dark 4* [top] is aimed squarely at the hardcore

Aware that the budding mass market means a blossoming hardcore market, smart publishers are picking up major talents for the next generation to produce titles that might otherwise confuse the average Joe. For example, Midway (perhaps the epitome of mass-market gaming), has signed 7 Studios, a design house run by exactly seven developers (including such luminaries as Erik Yeo, one of the masterminds behind *Command & Conquer*) whose reputations as hardcore gamers are well earned. As you might expect, 7 Studios will not be working on licensed products; it will instead be developing action/strategy titles for PlayStation 2.

Infogrames, meanwhile, in its effort to discover what next-generation mass-market titles will be like, is also fostering young talent. Bonnell says, "The companies that are in trouble are those that are old-fashioned with old talent. You need young, talented designers who grew up with videogames" to reach a generation that was raised on games. For the hardcore, this is good news — it is, after all, unlikely that young designers raised on games will spontaneously decide that the best games are based on deer hunting.

"Our obsession is critical mass," Bonnell explains. "We have no choice." While that critical mass may mean great profits for the companies, it looks unlikely it will mean an end to great games. NG



"Mass-market" has traditionally meant unchallenging but flashy gameplay like Accolade's *Test Drive* [left] or THQ's *WCW* games [right]

CAN PC GAMES REACH THE MASSES?

Before there were consoles, the PC was home to all gamers worth their salt. But as the console revolution has avalanched, the PC market has grown more slowly, making it a "second rate" business, according to Infogrames' Bonnell.

It's a particularly challenging market because while consoles are a worldwide sensation, the PC is only strong in the U.S. and Germany. With companies keeping their eye on the mass-market pie, the PC has a lot of growing up to do before it can be considered a window to million-seller hits.

Rob Dyer, president of Eidos Interactive's North American operation, is no stranger to the continental divide between the booming console market and the not-so-meteoric PC market. As former head of Crystal Dynamics, a PC and console developer, and now president of one of the world's largest multi-platform publishers, Dyer remains unconvinced the PC will hit mass market.

"The PC will not be mass market until it's plug and play," Dyer says. While Dyer sees consoles becoming like VCRs in the next generation — a must-own — the PC's learning curve will remain a tremendous barrier. Bonnell agrees. "Most high-end PC games are too complicated," he says with a smile. "Even ours."

However, the PC market *could* eventually get near the kind of critical mass consoles are now approaching. Dyer looks to plunging PC prices and the fast technology cycle of the PC (while consoles stay put for years, the PC is always improving) as two of its potential strengths in reaching larger audiences. But in the end, he never sees the PC becoming the kind of consumer appliance for games that consoles will become over the next generation.

Does this mean an end to PC games? No. There is always money to be made in PC games, and Dyer, for one, does not see the console swallowing the PC's market. "Games on PC that are successful are completely different from console games," he explains. "And they always will be."

DOLPHIN SHOCKER:
NO MOVIES, "VERY AGGRESSIVE" PRICE

Lincoln reveals **key details of Nintendo's plans for Dolphin**

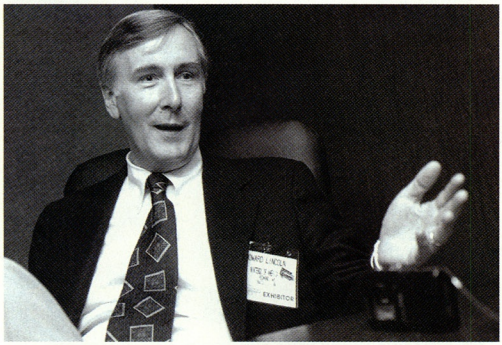
Most people were so stunned at Nintendo's E3 announcement that it would have partners for Dolphin, rather than going it alone, that they missed what may have been a hint of an even more interesting — and important — part of Nintendo's strategy: an extremely low price for the unit.

According to Howard Lincoln, CEO of Nintendo of America, while Nintendo's partners' machines (most likely Panasonic-branded DVD players) will be able to play Dolphin games as well as DVD movies and audio CDs, "you will not be able to play audio CDs on Nintendo's machine, and you will not be able to play movies. That's something that's already established."

Why not? "Nintendo is a videogame company, and that's exactly what our device will do — play the best videogames around. Our partners will have devices that will play games and movies and music: We are committed to bringing out the best videogame-playing device at a very, very aggressive price point." While Lincoln refused to comment on specific price points — **Next Generation** has heard launch estimates as low as $99 — he acknowledged that "as we go forwards toward launch, [price point] is going to be something we focus very carefully on."

"You will not be able to play audio CDs on Nintendo's machine, and you will not be able to play movies"

— Howard Lincoln, CEO, Nintendo of America *[pictured below]*



Nintendo's Dolphin strategy is a bold departure from the hardware practices the company has followed since NES launched in 1985

This strategy is interesting for two reasons. First, it shows that Nintendo and partners are committed to having real distinctions between the capabilities (and prices) of Dolphin-enabled machines: the Dolphin partners are clearly interested in promoting Dolphin as a long-lasting technology platform and standard, not a single retail product with the typical five-year console lifespan.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, is the fact that Nintendo is electing to produce the less expensive and more limited hardware. The company seems more comfortable in its established role of (relatively) low-cost toy manufacturer and marketer, and it will leave competing with Sony in the high-end consumer-electronics markets to partner Matsushita.

In fact, based on the announcements so far, while Nintendo was responsible for coordinating the other Dolphin partners (IBM, Matsushita, and ArtX), it almost seems as if it is the junior partner in the hardware itself. If true, this represents a major paradigm shift from the Super NES days, when the company's insistence on controlling hardware scuttled a major CD add-on deal with Sony (leading, ultimately, to Sony's entrance in the market with PlayStation). Nintendo, it seems, has determined that the future lies more in content creation with its incalculably valuable properties like *Mario* (and, of course, in licensing third parties) than it does in rigidly controlling all aspects of hardware production and marketing. NG

NEWS BYTES

Compiled by **Aaron John Loeb** of Next Generation Online

Dolphin in 2000? Not likely, if you ask most of Nintendo's competitors and industry analysts. Nintendo's new console is still being designed, making it unlikely, experts say, that IBM and NEC will be able to manufacture enough of the machine's processors and graphics chips in time for the announced Fall 2000 worldwide release. While a limited release is possible, Nintendo has also stated that N64 is only halfway through its lifecycle (a statement lent credence by growing sales of the hardware). It is unlikely that conservative Nintendo will enter the next generation until it must, making a 2000 release look less and less probable. **The franchise that just keeps giving:** EA Sports' *John Madden Football*. The company recently indicated its plans to keep on rolling out the *Maddens* by registering the Internet domains for *Madden 2000–2004*. Apparently, by 2005 the $1-billion-and-growing behemoth expects to be able to afford flying real football teams to every gamer's home. **Whose side are they on, anyway?** Semiconductor industry papers recently reported that NEC, one of Sega's closest partners in the Dreamcast project, will manufacture the graphics chip for Nintendo's Dolphin. NEC, apparently chosen by the Mario Corp. for its expertise in embedded RAM technology, is in serious financial straits, having lost over $1 billion dollars last year. Beggars can't be choosers... **And the Grammy goes to...** Tommy Tallarico. Well, not yet, but the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences recently announced the addition of a mysterious "Other Visual Media" category, likely meaning videogames, to the three award categories already

(continued on page 12)

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE IN THE WORKS

Reliable sources confirm project

WHAT IS IT?

Most RPGs feature save-the-world themes. In this one, you're a farmer.

Sony, clearly jealous of Nintendo's awesome success with Game Boy Color, is considering readying a handheld for release, according to reliable sources. There are two scenarios currently in play (both are probably being pursued simultaneously by SCEA). In the first, Sony acquires U.S. distribution rights for SNK's impressive Neo Geo Pocket (**NG 55**). In the second, Sony launches an original PlayStation-1-based device.

There are some hurdles for either scenario. Sony faces other bidders for Neo Geo Pocket, including acquisition-hungry Hasbro, one of the few companies that could go toe-to-toe with Nintendo in the marketplace. Also, SNK is touting current NGP's Dreamcast connectivity; and while PlayStation connectivity is in the planning, if Dreamcast is a success in the U.S., SNK would certainly want to take advantage of that success, something it couldn't do if Neo Geo Pocket had a Sony label on it.

More likely is a portable version of PlayStation. According to our sources, the device would look like a hybrid Sony DiscMan, with a 2.25-inch screen on the front of the disc cover. Supplied with a lithium-ion battery and low-power versions of PlayStation's CPU (which is also being used as the I/O chip in PlayStation 2) and graphics chip, the unit would probably include an integrated digital controller, but no analog capabilities. Although a DiscMan-sized player would be a lot less portable than the diminutive Neo Geo Pocket or Game Boy Color, it would boast compatibility with the entire PlayStation library.

Either way, the slick-looking but unimpressive PocketStation (with its pathetic 32x32 pixel display), which was conspicuously absent from Sony's booth at E3, will probably never see release on American soil. NG

At E3, SNK staffers said that "Plan A" was to sell the Neo Geo Pocket directly, online — but hinted that "Plan B" and "Plan C" involved deep-pocketed allies

NEWS BYTES

Compiled by **Aaron John Loeb** of Next Generation Online

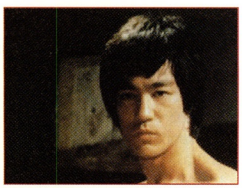
(continued from page 10)

given for film and television soundtracks. Tallarico, one of the best-known musicians in the industry, was last seen walking the floor of E3 in a leopard-print suit followed by a pair of surgically enhanced women and a dwarf in green body paint. Upon winning, he no doubt intends to thank all the little people. Sega's new challenge. At the beginning of June, Sega of Japan held a special conference in which it announced it would lower the price of Dreamcast in that country by around $80, from ¥29,800 ($245) to ¥19,900 ($165). While the company attributed the price drop to decreasing manufacturing costs being passed on to the consumer, the less charitably inclined would point to the system's failure to outsell even Nintendo 64 (universally accepted to be a failure in Japan) for the first half of 1999. It's official: Sony president (and PlayStation designer) Ken Kutaragi has announced that factories will start producing PlayStation 2 Emotion Engine processors this month in preparation for the system's public unveiling at Tokyo Game Show in September. Still, don't expect the system to launch until Sony has stockpiled enough units to meet demand — most likely not until December or later. Old companies never die... they just become Internet startups! Interactive Magic announced in March that it would sell off its unsuccessful retail CD-ROM publishing business and become an Internet-only company, redubbed the iMagic Entertainment Network. The company recently closed the sale with Ubi Soft, which will pick up iMagic's retail titles. This leads critics to wonder when Ubi Soft will sell off *its* unsuccessful retail CD-ROM publishing business and become an Internet-only company.

For daily game news, go to www.next-generation.com.

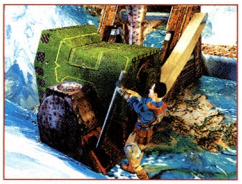
IN THE STUDIO

Five Westwood employees, including a programmer from the ***C&C: Tiberian Sun*** team, have left the company to form their own development group. (As a result, *Tiberian Sun* may suffer further delays.) The new company, called **Liquid Entertainment**, has been formed by Ed DelCastello, a former employee of both Westwood and Origin. The team is being backed by Crave Entertainment. Seven other employees joining the company come from Origin, Blizzard, Paradigm, and Iguana. The group of 12 (and growing) is based in Thousand Oaks, just outside Los Angeles, and is already working on a realtime strategy title for PC.



What's Universal Interactive planning for the future? Word on the street is that several developers are bidding for the company's highly-coveted **Bruce Lee** license. It's likely the game will be developed for **PlayStation 2**. Other PlayStation 2 titles in the works? How about a 3D remake of ***Spy Hunter***, being developed at **Paradigm Studios**, to be published by Midway.

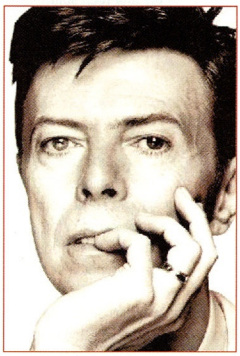
Presto Studios' forthcoming game



Beneath has been put on hold by Activision, and while neither **Activision** nor **Presto** could comment at press time as to the status of the project, another industry insider suggests that **Mindscape** may be picking up the publishing rights to the title. First previewed in **NG 48**, and originally scheduled for spring of '99, *Beneath* is a fantasy-exploration game in the style of ***Tomb Raider***.

Three former **Singletrac** employees have formed **Incognito**, a new Salt Lake City–based developer that will focus on PlayStation and PlayStation 2 games. Former Singletrac Producer Scott Campbell, former Senior Software Engineer Steve Poulson, and former Director of Production Software Randy Zorko, whose works include ***Twisted Metal***, ***Twisted Metal 2***, ***Rogue Trip***, and ***Warhawk***, have launched the company and are planning to build up to two teams. While Campbell maintains the group's parting with GT/Singletrac was an amicable one, **Next Generation** has learned that several other publishers are courting the developer.

Not since the rock group Journey graced the arcades with its self-titled videogame has there been a rock-intro-games crossover of this magnitude. One of the original princes of glam, Ziggy Stardust himself, **David Bowie**, will be providing all original songs for ***Omikron*** (first previewed in **NG 44**), a PC game being developed in France by **Quantic Dream** and set to be published by Eidos. Bowie's likeness will also be modeled into the game, as a character named Boz. Bowie's wife, supermodel Iman, is tentatively scheduled to be modeled into the game as well. The third-person adventure puts players in the role of a beat-cop who patrols the futuristic domed city of Omikron, or is it Suffragette City?



IT IS

Harvest Moon from Natsume. Originally for Super NES, a Nintendo 64 version is due later this year

PlayStation

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PSYGNOSIS

loading_

WipEout 3 tm

WWW.WIPEOUT3.COM

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GADGET WATCH

Sick of your analog stick? No problem

TILTFORCE/TILTPAK

Accessory newcomer Pelican has introduced two new motion-sensitive controllers for Nintendo 64 and PlayStation. Both use analog-chip technology from Analog Devices to sense the position of the controller in space, much like Microsoft's Freestyle Pro, replacing motions of an analog stick with the motion of the pad itself.

For N64, the Tilt Pak plugs into controller pack slot (it also functions as a rumble pack), with a dongle that goes between the controller cord and the N64, while the PlayStation Tilt Force comes as a replacement dual analog controller (with dual shock compatibility, too). Both retail for $29.95, and in testing we found both units worked equally well. With both you can adjust the sensitivity of the motion sensing or turn it on and off on the fly.

The TiltForce and TiltPack [left] add a new twist to control with high-tech analog chips. The TrueSteer [right] is a decidedly low-tech solution

How does it help games? For flight games and snowboarding titles, the greater range of motion the Tilt products enable gave us much finer and more detailed control — and controlling a game by moving the whole pad is kind of a cool novelty in itself. Where the products really shined for us was in driving games — moving the whole pad seemed much more intuitive than steering with a joystick. Even action/adventures like *Tomb Raider* controlled well. While certainly not for all games (fighting games, especially, don't benefit), the TiltForce and TiltPak are well worth checking out if you're looking for an edge. Pelican's web site is http://www.pelicanacc.com.

TRUESTEER

On the low-tech side of things, Invent-tech has introduced the TrueSteer, a foam-rubber steering wheel that actually snaps onto your existing N64 controller. It then mechanically converts the rotational movement of the wheel into movement of the analog stick. Nifty, and at $12, cheap. Check out http://www.truesteer.com for more info. NG

ARCADIA

BY MARCUS WEBB, EDITOR OF REPLAY MAGAZINE

SEGA: LOSSES CONTINUE

Already $2 billion in debt, Sega Enterprises of Japan estimated a net loss of ¥45 billion ($378 million) in the financial year ended March 31. The loss was mostly blamed on amusement operations outside of Japan and unsold Saturn inventory. Sega said it would cut 25% of its 4,000-strong workforce and close about 100 arcades (most in Japan, apparently). The company posted a consolidated loss of ¥35.6 billion ($299 million) the previous year.

Despite reports to the contrary in the arcade-industry trade press, Sega has no specific or current plans to download videogame software to arcades, according Al Stone, president of Sega Enterprises USA. "We are certainly researching satellite downloading technology," says Stone, "but development of this is not complete or definite by any means. At present, there is no plan for introduction of such technology. There is a possibility of future introduction of this type of system someday, but I'd like to stress that there is no specific plan right now." Regarding Sega's volume of Naomi shipments, Stone says one recent report "sounded as if Sega had already shipped 200,000 units of our Naomi arcade board. Actually, our first-year plan for Naomi is to ship that many boards worldwide. We have not yet done so by any means."

By the way, the Sega Tournament Network (STN) began its public "alpha phase" testing in May. The test is ongoing in Sega GameWorks locations only. This network links games via modem for instant, nationwide score rankings.

MIDWAY'S GAME LOCATOR

Midway Games launched an "arcade game locator" service last month on the company website at www.midway.com, designed to help players find their favorite Midway and Williams coin-op games at locations around the world. The game locator can be accessed from the Midway web site or directly at www.midwayarcade.com/locations. The locator database is updated every business day and currently includes the four latest Midway titles, *CarnEvil*, *NFL Blitz 99*, *Hydro Thunder*, and *NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC*.

NEWS & NOTES

Capcom Coin-Op Inc. and SNK have confirmed their "Capcom Vs. SNK" videogame will go to arcades as well as the new SNK handheld unit, but at press time neither company knew which would build and market the arcade version… America's most successful arcade chain for grownups, Dave & Buster's, will list shares of common stock on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol DAB. They are already trading on Nasdaq under the symbol DANB… Sega GameWorks has announced plans to open its third Florida location. The company signed an agreement with Steiner & Associates, managers of the Centro Ybor, to open a 21,000 sq. ft. GameWorks at the new retail entertainment complex slated to open in spring 2000… Psygnosis' hugely popular PlayStation game *WipeOut* has been released as a fully interactive motion-simulation game for Thomson Entertainment's Venturer S2 capsule simulator. This version includes an expanded range of weapons and additional features such as pit stops and bonus scoring checkpoints. NG

HARDCORE

Back when I was 15, my kid brother came to me with the news that our next-door neighbors were out for the weekend. Being neighborly and all, they had once given their key to our parents "just in case." Normally, that wouldn't mean anything — except that they had *Super Mario Brothers* — on a Nintendo system! It sure beat playing *Popeye* on the TI99/4a for the 800th time. So, we went over, let ourselves in, and started playing *Mario*. I was in heaven — at least until we heard their car pull in to the driveway. We scrambled to the front door, but couldn't figure out the locks — we were trapped and caught. To make matters worse, I lied that we thought we saw somebody walking around inside the house, and that we came over to investigate. What an idiot! I think the next few hours of watching my mom pace back and forth waiting for my dad to come home were the scariest hours of my life. Needless to say, our neighbors' key was promptly returned. My excuse: I somehow knew, even then, that it was important for my future career!

Darren Johnson
Programmer, *Star Wars: Episode One Racer* for N64
LucasArts Entertainment Company

BIG IN **JAPAN**

Pacific Rim dispatches

Pokémon Festival '99

Pokémon Festival '99 drew thousands of mindless pocket-monster drones from all over Japan for contests and first looks at new and ever-cuter Pokémon related stuff of every description — hide your eyes from the flashing lights or you too will be assimilated

Held in the Tokyo Ryutsu Center in April, Pokémon Festival '99 attracted thousands of rabid Pocket Monster fans. The exhibition was split into four main zones: *Pokémon Snap*, *Pokémon Stadium*, *Pokémon Pinball*, and the tournament area. Nintendo, for whom the *Pokémon* phenomenon has been a license to print money, seized the opportunity to introduce its latest titles, *Pokémon Stadium 2*, *Pokémon Gold*, and *Pokémon Silver*. As you can imagine, hundreds of dolls, trading cards, scale models, and every other conceivable Pokémon-related item was also on display. The puffy little monsters are already sapping the collective will of kids across the U.S., and their unabated popularity in their home country could make this the first generation of monster-controlled mind slaves on Earth. NG

Virtual High School

Adding new meaning to the term "open source," a growing number of high school students across Japan are jointly developing a networked, persistent online world for PC. The unique, and quintessentially Japanese, spin on the idea is that the game belongs in the same genre as the popular *Tokimeki Memorial* series: a high-school simulator. Featuring anime-style characters with 2D illustrations, players can select either a male or female character and enter the virtual high school, where they can wander through classrooms, meet other students, and interact with them in real time over the Internet. The development group ambitiously hopes to eventually be able to host up to 8,000 players. Much like Linux and other open source movements, however, the software is free and under the development of independent students who work together over the Net. Why students who are actually *in* high school would work so hard to spend their free time *pretending* to be in high school is unknown. NG

All over Japan, high-school students are crowding around PCs to log onto the Internet and, um, pretending to be in high school

Tekken Tag Tournament

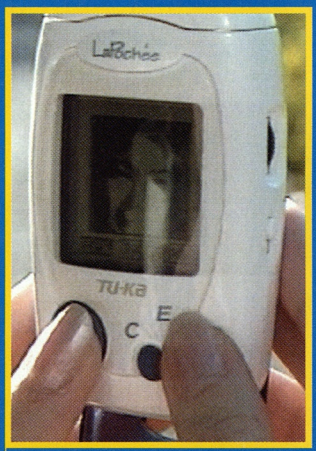
Months of rumors ended in May, when Namco finally unveiled its latest *Tekken* sequel: *Tekken Tag Tournament*. Running on System 12, *Tag Tournament* is graphically similar to *Tekken 3*, with many stages remaining basically the same except for added lighting effects. The Hong Kong stage, for example, is now set at night under glaring neon.

Tag Tournament features all the characters that have ever appeared in any previous arcade or console version, but the game's most notable new feature is a team battle mode similar to that found in *Marvel vs. Capcom*. Players begin by selecting two characters and can switch between them at any time during the fight using an added fifth button. The catch? The loser is the first player to have either character's life gauge reduced to zero.

Some upgrades have been made to the characters, with slightly higher polygon counts and smoother texturing, but after the difficulties the company had in porting *Tekken 3* to PlayStation, many are wondering whether *Tag Tournament's* multiple fighters will prove an insurmountable hurdle to a PlayStation version. Oddsmakers strongly favor Dreamcast or even PlayStation 2 if and when *Tag Tournament* ever comes to the home. NG

***Tekken Tag Tournament* features every character who's ever been in any version of *Tekken* ever, a number of which are "time released" and won't be available until after certain dates — a ploy that's sure to keep the faithful coming back in the weeks ahead**

La Pochee

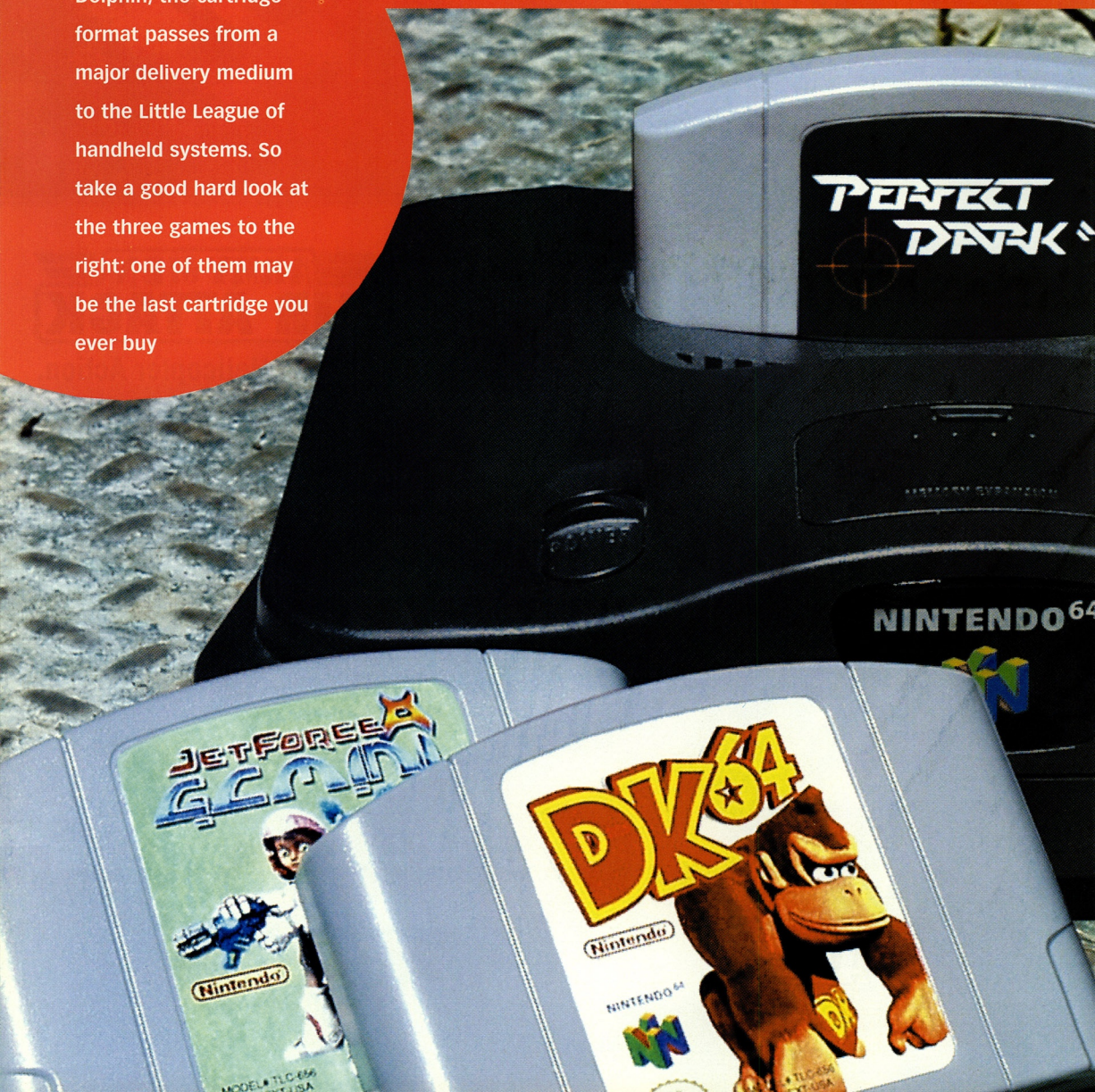


Take a quick (grainy, black-and-white) snap of yourself and send it to a friend over your cel phone with La Pochee

Next in line for the must-have gadget of the week is La Pochee from Tuka, a leading Japanese cellular phone manufacturer. La Pochee is a black-and-white mini-camera that connects to a cel phone and lets the user send photographs through a phone line (naturally, the recipient must also own La Pochee). At press time, the price was ¥11,500 (around $105, although there's no word on whether the device will ever be available outside Japan), but rival Nippon Telephone and Telegraph (NTT) has already announced it's working on a prototype of a color camera that could be connected to a cel phone. No price or release date has been given yet, but the next round of phone gadget wars is on. NG

RARE'S TRIPLE THREAT

As Nintendo prepares for DVD with Project Dolphin, the cartridge format passes from a major delivery medium to the Little League of handheld systems. So take a good hard look at the three games to the right: one of them may be the last cartridge you ever buy



The glorious age of the cartridge is ending, but not before Rare delivers *Perfect Dark*, *Jet Force Gemini*, and *Donkey Kong 64* into the hands of N64 owners later this year

Now faced with its last major holiday season for Nintendo 64, Rare is once again stepping up to the plate with three of the most important titles for Nintendo — *Perfect Dark*, *Jet Force Gemini*, and *Donkey Kong 64*, all backed by multi-million-dollar marketing and sales campaigns. Nintendo will be fighting for every sale as Sega rolls out Dreamcast and its impressive launch lineup and PlayStation plays host to big hitters like *Dino Crisis*, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, and *Gran Turismo 2*. If 1999 is going be Nintendo's biggest year without any help from a Miyamoto-developed title — and it might be — the company is going to earn every cent with these three games.

PERFECT DARK

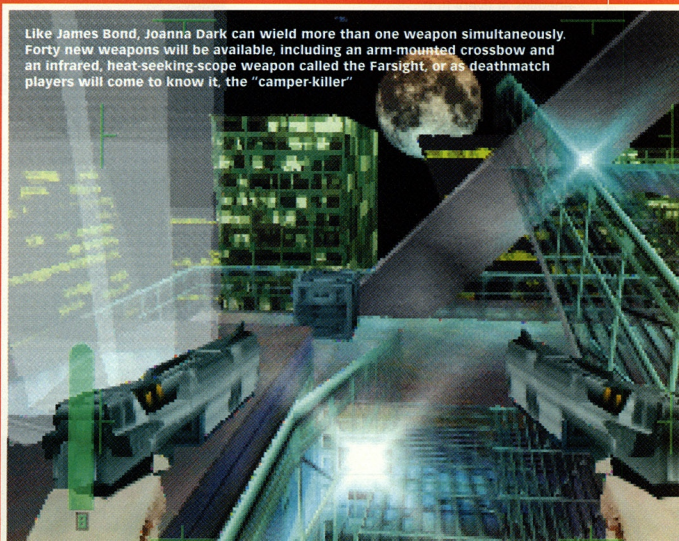
Release Date: December 1999 Origin: U.K.

GoldenEye was exceeded in sales only by *Mario 64*, and there hasn't been an announced *Mario* sequel yet. And since the same team responsible for *GoldenEye 007* is responsible for *Perfect Dark*, the game is sure to be the **Next Generation** reader's most anticipated N64 purchase this year. Like *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark* puts players in the first-person role of an agent, but this time around, that agent isn't James Bond, it's Joanna Dark, and the year is 2023.

Despite the changes in character and setting, the gameplay remains akin to *GoldenEye* with the addition of an *X-Files* twist. What begins as a simple recon mission becomes Joanna Dark's quest to uncover alien races, corrupt corporations, and global conspiracies. Bringing back the best aspects of *007*'s single and multiplayer gameplay, *Perfect Dark*'s early levels already deliver unrelenting action. In order to store all 17 levels and extensive cut scenes, the cartridge will be five times the size of *GoldenEye*. But don't judge the game just by the size of the cartridge — much of the game engine has been completely reworked.

"Rare threw away everything they didn't like about the *GoldenEye* engine," says Nintendo's Ken Lobb. "Which was a lot." While the team is working on improving the framerate and animation, what really stood out in the E3 version of the game was the AI: enemies now have the ability to assess potential threats, find cover, and execute long-range teamwork.

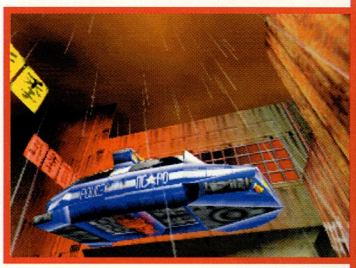
Single-player AI isn't all that's



Like James Bond, Joanna Dark can wield more than one weapon simultaneously. Forty new weapons will be available, including an arm-mounted crossbow and an infrared, heat-seeking-scope weapon called the Farsight, or as deathmatch players will come to know it, the "camper-killer"

been improved, as the enhanced multiplayer modes implement the use of bots, which until now were only found in PC first-person shooters. Single players can deathmatch with up to seven bots, and four human players can add another four bots for eight-player deathmatches. And while it hasn't been determined yet, Rare indicates the number of bots could go as high as 14.

Perfect Dark's exact use of the Expansion Pak has yet to be determined, though it's likely to enhance lighting and larger game environments. But the game's real expansion comes in the form of Nintendo's Transfer Pak. Utilizing this Transfer Pak (shipping with *Pokémon Stadium* this October) and the Game Boy Camera, players can apply a Game Boy Camera picture to a *Perfect Dark* deathmatch model, enabling you to put your own face in the game — as well as brighten, color, and stretch the image to fit. With a small amount of practice, the whole process takes less than a minute. Once created, you can save your character in the cart or on a Controller Pak. (What Congress will make of the ability to play with your friends' pictures in deathmatch is undetermined.)



The future, according to Rare, will include flying cars and rain. Maybe they've been watching too much *Blade Runner*...

Considering the fantastic combination of stealthy single-player and multiplayer gameplay Bond delivered back in August of '97, we can't wait to lock, load, and sneak around with Joanna Dark later this year.

JET FORCE GEMINI

Release Date: August/September 1999 Origin: U.K.

Maybe you've heard this one before — defend the Earth from the threat of an evil warlord and his army of alien insects. Sure, it's a story as old as *Space Invaders* itself, and *Jet Force Gemini* does indeed hearken players back to the days when players shot first and asked questions later. One look at the graphics in this sleeper from Rare, though, and you'll know it's a '90s title.

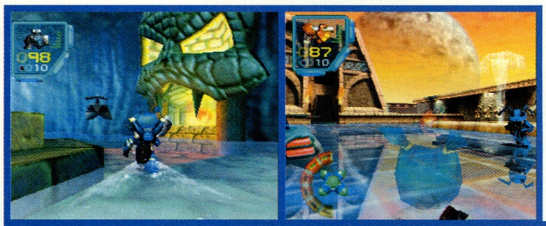
Created by the same team responsible for *Blast Corps* and *Diddy Kong Racing*, *Jet Force* is part action, part adventure, and part puzzle-solving. Played out in epic form, the game chronicles the journey of its three main characters — Juno, Vela, and Lupus — through intricately designed stages packed with enemies at every turn.

Jet Force Gemini follows Rare's formula for engrossing gameplay: delivering more than 120 stages with an average of 15 stages per level. But it's more than just picking a character and plugging away — to get the full experience of *Jet Force Gemini*, players need to alternate between all three characters in order to meet the various objectives.

Of course you can't defeat an army of insects without weapons, and players will have access to more than 20, including homing weapons, rapid-fire guns, and various explosives. The arsenal will come in handy, as the player will frequently be faced with more than 20 enemies at once, a first for both 32- and 64-bit systems. This, tied to the fact that many areas are structured with patterned attacks, really gives the game a strong feeling of 16-bit action games like *Gunstar Heroes* and *Ninja Warriors*.

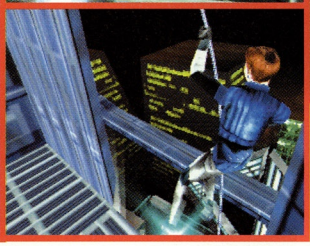
Of course, like any good action/platformer, the game will feature plenty of secret zones and a two-player cooperative mode where players can team up and blast through levels. Beyond that, *Jet Force* will include multiplayer deathmatch, a top-down multiplayer race mode, and a police-style trainer with pop-up targets.

The version shown to **Next Generation** already exhibits brilliant textures and wondrous landscapes that will make even PC gamers envious. What is also impressive is that the game wasn't running with the 4MB Expansion Pak. Whether or not the Pak even helps will be revealed when the game ships late this summer.



Don't let these massive, beautifully textured indoor and outdoor areas fool you — *Jet Force* is an action game, incorporating numerous weapons and various modes of gameplay

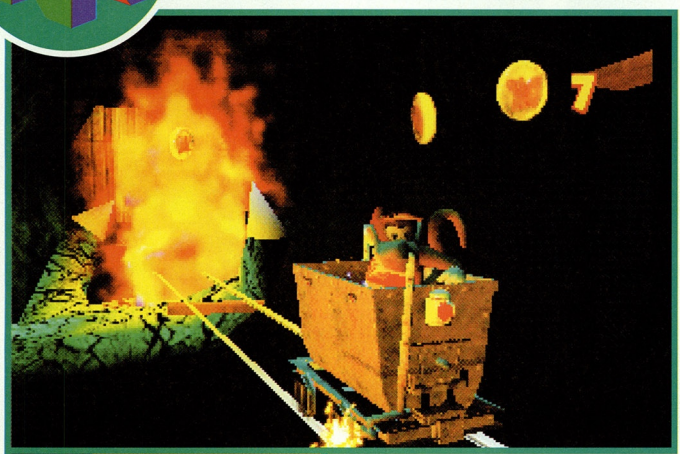
Each character has special abilities, and players have to effectively utilize all three to progress through the game. Vela [below] is the only character who can swim; Juno can walk on fire; and the dog, Lupus, has jet engines on his paws that enable him to jump high and float for considerable distances

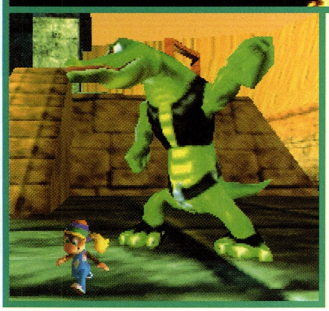


In order to make players more familiar with Joanna Dark and her intriguing storyline, Rare has added intro and exit cut sequences with extensive voiceovers. The intro [left] is a long cinematic with Joanna dropping from a helicopter onto the roof of a highrise building. Expect a whopping 90 minutes of cut scenes interspersed throughout the game

DONKEY KONG 64

Release Date: November 1999 Origin: U.K.





Elements of *Donkey Kong Country* such as shooting characters through barrels and driving a mine cart on broken tracks have all made it into the N64 version of the game, although on a much larger 3D scale

Since Nintendo 64's release, every key Nintendo franchise — with the notable exception of *Metroid* — has jumped to 64-bit — *Zelda*, *F-Zero*, and, of course, *Mario*. Now, after much delay, *Donkey Kong* makes its way to Nintendo 64. Secretly in development for close to four years, *Donkey Kong 64* is one of the biggest games ever created for the system. Fully incorporating the 4MB Expansion Pak, which will be required to play the game, *Donkey Kong 64* boasts massive environments, phenomenal graphics, and unprecedented gameplay.

While previous *Donkey Kong* games were very linear, *Donkey Kong 64* enables players to take many paths to complete the game. *Donkey Kong 64* only has eight levels, but each presents five goals for each of the five characters, resulting in 200 total objectives. Just as in previous *Donkey Kong* games, players will be able to use Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong as well as a cast of new characters including Tiny, Chunky, and Lanky Kong. Each Kong will have its own unique set of abilities that need to be mastered in order to progress, and only certain characters have been enabled with the skillset to complete special tasks, that in turn, will open new areas.

Yet even with the extra 4MB, the N64 is showing its limitations. But *Donkey Kong 64* will likely prove innovation doesn't always require new technology, just an imaginative designer. *Donkey Kong* never looked or played better then it already does here, as you can probably imagine yourself. NG

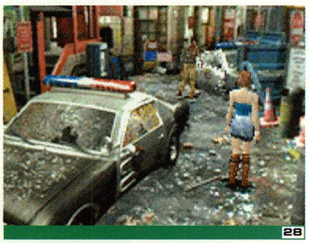
Donkey Kong's Last Stand

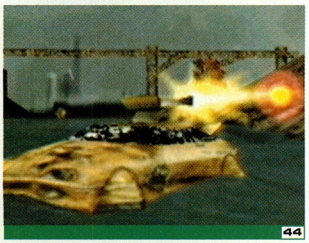
Back in 1994, when SNES was on its last legs, Rare released *Donkey Kong Country*. Showcasing a proprietary real-time 3D technology called Advanced Computer Modeling (ACM), *Donkey Kong Country* treated players to unparalleled graphics and gameplay. At the time, it quickly became one of the fastest selling videogames in history, according to NPD's TRSTS Video Games Tracking Service, *Donkey Kong Country* has sold through 2.75 million–3.25 million units since October of 1994. Will *DK 64* produce similar numbers for N64? Time will tell.

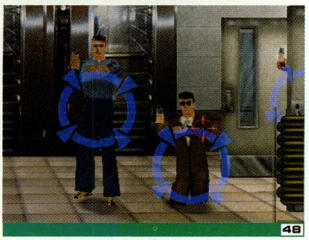
Resident Evil 3 PlayStation **Ready 2 Rumble** Dreamcast **The Sims** PC
F355 Challenge Arcade **Vigilante 8** Dreamcast **Soldier of Fortune** PC

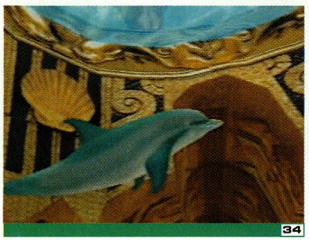
ALPHAS

The cream of the crop from developers far and near









Here's a change: Dreamcast is now included with our regular preview coverage. The most advanced console on the market has some tasty games coming, but then so do PlayStation and PC. Read on...

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	PlayStation	**28**
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MILESTONES

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GAMEDAY 2000	PlayStation	**71**
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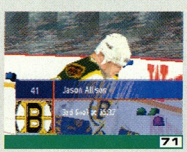


Backgrounds are far more detailed than in the previous games and involve the player more than ever before. Even with all of the extras like dripping water and the erupting fire hydrant, the load times are faster than they have ever been for a game of this type

RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS

This experts-only *Evil* proves there's still plenty of life left in zombie hunting

Welcome back to the city of the damned. In the three years since the smashing success of *Resident Evil*, there have been a rash of survival-horror games rushed to market. However, while a couple of notable efforts like *Silent Hill* and *Clock Tower* may have managed to add their own wrinkles to the genre, none has proven it can match the intensity of the *Resident Evil* series — with the exception of *Resident Evil* Producer Shinji Mikami's own *Dino Crisis* (**NG 54**). And, as the series enters its third installment, therein lies the problem: since *Dino Crisis* is so fresh and looks so formidable, can the aging saga of *Resident Evil* keep up? The answers lie inside Raccoon City, where Jill Valentine (co-star of the original *Resident Evil*) returns.

The story picks up where the original *Resident Evil* left off, but only hours before the events in *Resident Evil 2*. Jill Valentine, having retired from the S.T.A.R.S. team, is heading out of town when she is once again trapped as Raccoon City begins crawling with the Umbrella Corporation's flesh-eating spawn. Although Jill remains the central character, players will switch at certain times to the role of Carlos Oliveira, a hot-blooded former employee of the Umbrella Corporation, who has gone in to recover survivors. At times, players will also be forced to make decisions that branch the game off into subquests. (The game's replayability will come in exploring the other branches.) **Next Generation**'s build of the game stars Jill, but it doesn't necessarily begin at the beginning of the game: Jill has already acquired a handgun, and the city is swarming with zombies. We took comfort in finding all the familiar items — ammo, a shotgun, healing herbs, healing spray, save ribbons, equipment chests, a lighter, and (ahem) a lock pick — and put them to good use. The environments will also certainly be familiar to those who survived *RE2*, and the city streets and tight alleyways are again littered with flesh-eaters. Players will even venture back inside the Raccoon City Police Department for some answers.

Although *Dino Crisis* has upgraded to fully 3D environments, *Resident Evil 3* maintains the same pre-rendered backgrounds of the series, but the *RE3* team has made the world noticeably crisper and cleaner than previous efforts, thanks in part to using a higher resolution. The camera placement has also been improved — it's subtle, but you don't feel as removed from the action as you could at times in the other games.

The puzzles are better, too. In many instances, progress still requires finding the keys to open doors, but not every door is controlled by a shiny little key.

At first, Jill only meets people who are running for their lives, but then she meets up with a S.T.A.R.S. team member who warns her that Nemesis is methodically hunting the team members down

FORMAT
PlayStation

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Capcom

RELEASE DATE
November 1999

ORIGIN
Japan

The zombie count has been increased significantly so no matter where you are, you are surrounded by flesh-eating minions of the undead

While the previous *RE* games have been bloody, *RE3* takes it to a whole new extreme. When shot, zombies explode into bloody chunks that fly across the room and bounce on the floor

When Nemesis bursts through the window behind you armed with a bazooka, there is only one thing you can do — run! Panic stricken, you must make your way back through the station before Nemesis grinds you to a pulp

Zombies feel no pain, so a handgun isn't as effective as you might think. Shoot them in the chest and you'll only knock them back some — the best strategy is to shoot them in the head or legs

Some can only be opened with the right tools, and some require combinations. Unlike some of the odd puzzles from past games (remember starting the fire to melt the painting to obtain the jewel in *RE2*?), the puzzles here make sense, blending harmoniously with the player's quest to get the hell out of Dodge . . . er, Raccoon.

And Raccoon City has never been more frightening. Mikami's huge team of 50 has created an even more terrifying atmosphere than before. Continued improvements and the tweaking of the engine have enabled the team to really up the quality of the character models, and the characters are now skinned for a smoother look. This adds to the zombie models tremendously — not only are they better looking, but we've counted as many as six onscreen at one time. There's also wider variety of zombies: you'll see fat ones, short ones, and both male and female zombies, all in various stages of decay, which lends more credibility to the scenario (and lessens any redundancy you might have felt after killing the same zombie model 26 times).

Did we mention the zombies also now have better AI? Zombies will now come onto stairways after you, tracking you more realistically, and each zombie moves at its own speed. Occasionally a really maneuverable one will come at a surprising pace, which is guaranteed to raise your blood pressure a little. At other times, what may look like a corpse will get off the ground to surprise you.

But what really increases the fear and dread you'll feel playing the game is Nemesis. This mysterious hulking menace stalks Jill multiple times over the course of the game. S.T.A.R.S. Pilot Brad Vickers, who has a minor role in the game, hints during a cut scene that Nemesis is specifically hunting S.T.A.R.S. team members. Unlike the

Think fast! When zombies come bursting through a police barrier, there isn't time to engage them at close range without getting mauled. Your only chance is to use your wits and back off so that they can be taken out by an exploding barrel

***RE3* is made for advanced players, so there are more moments of blind panic to deal with when a bloody zombie bursts in on you or a dog jumps out of the darkness, cutting off your only means of escape**

As you make your way through Raccoon City, you will hear the citizenry cry out for help as they are attacked. Invariably, you are too late, and the zombies are already having a feast

relatively slow and mindless zombies, Nemesis relentlessly chases the player. If his ominous, leather-clad presence suddenly crashing through a window isn't enough to scare you, this behemoth carries a bazooka, which he shoots accurately, and he also delivers powerful hand-to-hand blows.

But it's more than just the zombies and the ruthless Nemesis that help create the scary atmosphere. The new music and sound effects are beautifully composed and wondrously integrated. The haunting soundtrack blends with the rustling wind to instill a feeling of isolation. When in the course of exploration you finally hear the cries of human voices, it is often too late. Voiceover acting in the cut scenes is noticeably improved over previous entries in the series, and the fantastic audio cues remain intact.

Still, while the city, zombies, and many items look familiar, don't bet on the game playing the same way. Straight off the bat, the maps in *Resident Evil 3* are far more complex; the team at Capcom has expanded the world to offer the player many more choices in navigating the city. The game is being designed for hardcore *Resident Evil* fans, and while it will be harder, a new "action" button enables players to dodge or tackle enemies, and the addition of a quick 180° spin move should also prove handy.

You'll need all the help you can get: while other companies are working to tailor their games for the new mass market, Mikami himself has intimated that this is to be a game for expert *Resident Evil* players only. The faster, smarter zombies and the threat of Nemesis mean you'll have to move faster and think faster to beat the game.

As he does in the forthcoming *Dino Crisis*, Mikami keeps the feeling of the living world in *Resident Evil 3* by scattering random animations throughout the environment. Certain areas will crackle with wildfire, and on one street, a fire hydrant spraying water shows off particle-system effects. Mikami's ingenuity brings life to the game even though the hardware is clearly aging. And while we wait patiently for glimpses of Claire Redfield's next adventure on Dreamcast, from what Mikami's given us so far of *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, we won't mind waiting. NG

While the city, zombies, and many items will look familiar, don't bet on the game playing the same way

F355 CHALLENGE

One of the most realistic racing sims ever to hit the arcade? Wonder who that's from...

FORMAT
Arcade

PUBLISHER
AM2

DEVELOPER
Sega

RELEASE DATE
Summer 2000

ORIGIN
Japan

To say that AM2's Yu Suzuki is a car nut is like saying the Pacific is a "big" ocean. The man who gave the world *Virtua Fighter* has also consistently been at the forefront of racing design at least as far back as *Hang On* in '85 and, of course, *Out Run* in '86.

F355 Challenge has been conscientiously designed from the ground up to be the ultimate in arcade racing realism. In designing it, Suzuki worked closely with actual Ferrari designers, who shared proprietary information and obliged the *Challenge* team with performance trials to collect as much data for the physics engine as possible. He also conducted interviews with a number of other Ferrari drivers — and it should be pointed out that he rather famously owns a number of them himself.

F355 Challenge has been conscientiously designed from the ground up to be the ultimate in arcade racing realism

The result is shaping up to be an arcade machine that's about as close to the real thing as you can get without shelling out a couple of hundred grand. The cabinet is modeled after the one used for *Lost World* — totally enclosed, with a speaker on either side of the player's head. Three separate Naomi boards run three different screens, one for the front view, and one for each side, so you can see opposing cars approaching and attempting to pass.

The graphics (currently about 70% complete) are well on par with what we've come to expect from a Naomi-powered title — and remember, *F355* uses *three* Naomi boards

Much like AM2's previous *Super GT*, headed by Toshishiro Nagoshi, Suzuki's *F355 Challenge* is less about the thrill of blowing by every other car on the track, and more about learning the intricacies of competition driving and optimizing your own performance. The game offers three skill levels — novice, intermediate, and simulator — each of which is designed to not only accommodate the relative skill of the player, but also to teach you how to drive better.

In novice level, the computer handles shifting and also oversees four other functions: Stability Control (adjustment to

Although they don't have anything to do with gameplay, the introductory teaser screens crackle along and do a nice job of setting the mood

The game debuted at the "Sega Private Show" in May, introduced by Suzuki himself. The prototype cabinet had all three screens but lacked the final version's outer casing

Since *F355* uses three display screens, you can look to the side and actually see cars trying to pass — important information when you can win or lose by tenths of a second

The feeling of speed is palpable at times, especially considering that the cabinet is dark and you've got speakers blaring in your ears

After each race, the game prints a summary of your performance

steering during corners), Traction Control (adjustment to the spoiler controls tire grip), ABS (antilock braking), and IBS (intelligent braking, which automatically brakes during a curve). A panel onscreen shows an icon for each system, which lights up when it's activated to give the player feedback on their driving technique — brake here, take the curve a little less hard there. Intermediate level enables a High/Low gearshift, and the IBS is turned off, while simulator level requires using all six gears and disables all assistance.

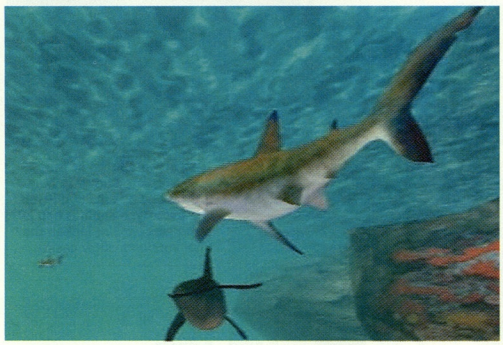
In addition, there are three modes of play, all of which can be accessed at any skill level: training mode, free run, and race. Training mode shows the right "line" to take on a track and gives advice on when to brake and shift. Free run simply puts you on the track alone, while race mode pits you against eight other cars. To measure your performance, the cabinet will even make of printout giving your time, engine RPM, and gear changes over the course of the race; the percent of the race you held the proper line; and other data, which you can use to gauge your skill and compare with other players.

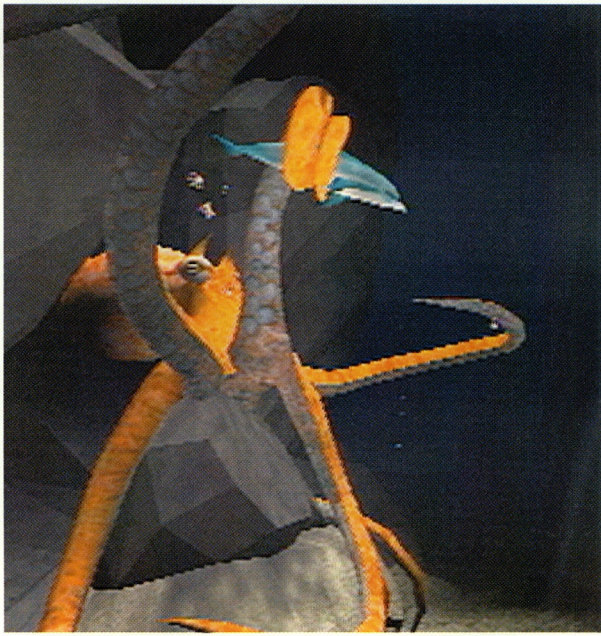
F355 will offer five different authentic circuits — Motegi, Monza, Sugo, Suzuka, and Long Beach — all of which have been accurately modeled. Even the spectators in the crowd are fully 3D and animated, replacing the 2D bitmaps that usually make up the crowd in a racing game.

F355 will offer five different authentic circuits — Motegi, Monza, Sugo, Suzuka, and Long Beach

F355 Challenge is certainly one of the most ambitious arcade racers ever attempted. It's certain to catch on in Japan, where Yu Suzuki's celebrity status and the obsessive nature of Japanese arcade-goers almost guarantee a loyal following. With the growing popularity of upscale arcades in the U.S. like Dave & Busters and Sega's own Gameworks, it may very well find a home here as well.

Now all we need is a Dreamcast version. NG





In the underwater world of *Ecco*, danger is omnipresent. Those who played the 16-bit versions of the game will remember their encounters with giant octopi — a wholly different experience in 3D, but just as exhilarating as the original

ECCO THE DOLPHIN – DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

The elegant, lethal, and loveable hero will make a splashing return to the gaming world next spring — can he still make waves?

Appaloosa's first Dreamcast title was shown as a self-running demo at this year's E3, but it showed more promise than many playable games presented at the show. While Ecco is known best for his 16-bit debut on Genesis, he last appeared on Sega CD and never made it to the doomed Saturn. Perhaps Sega was wise to let this aquatic hero skip a generation — if Appaloosa can stay its course with the *Ecco* franchise, it will impress even the most fervent skeptics among gamers.

The game is set in a universe somewhat similar to its 16-bit versions, as the player controls Ecco in a fully 3D undersea environment rendered realistically by the Dreamcast hardware. Producer Gergely Csaszar calls it "mainly an adventure game with action elements. It is not 'stage-based' but more of a huge underwater and above-water world created to be explored by the player."

The game will be subdivided into four distinct areas (the first being "Paradise Island," the others created around widely different themes and settings), each consisting of physical areas that you can travel freely in between. The world is being created using Appaloosa's proprietary Game World Builder technology, a realtime 3D-environment simulating tool running under Windows. The program allows designers to build and populate the game areas using a drag-and-drop interface.

"[It's] similar to how you put Lego pieces together," Csaszar says, "except that here, you drag and drop 'living creatures' rather than plastic blocks."

The character models of Ecco and the other sea creatures are solid representatives of Dreamcast's power. The dolphin's body, for instance, is so smooth that it seems to consist of only one "building block." It's virtually impossible to distinguish any joints, edges, or even polygons on the models. The programmers at Appaloosa's Hungarian studio have created a skeletal animation engine that simulates a bone structure complete with joints, muscles, and a smooth skin surface. Appaloosa is paying particular attention to enabling the player

FORMAT
Dreamcast

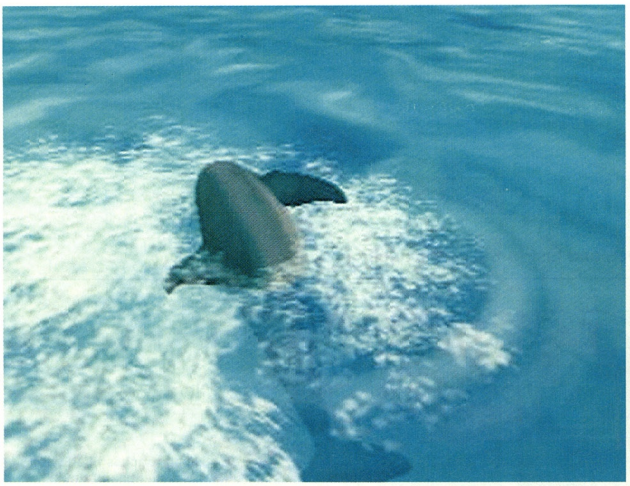
PUBLISHER
Sega

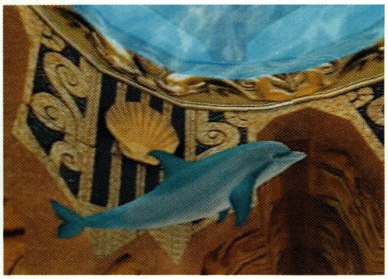
DEVELOPER
Appaloosa Interactive

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2000

ORIGIN
Hungary/U.S.

These whales are actually much bigger than Ecco but are located in the distance. Are the days of pop-up finally over?





The importance of getting air — an important strategic element in the Genesis/Sega CD versions — has yet to be decided

to combine all available movements seamlessly. This intuitive gameplay will allow the player to perform creative acrobatics below and above the water surface.

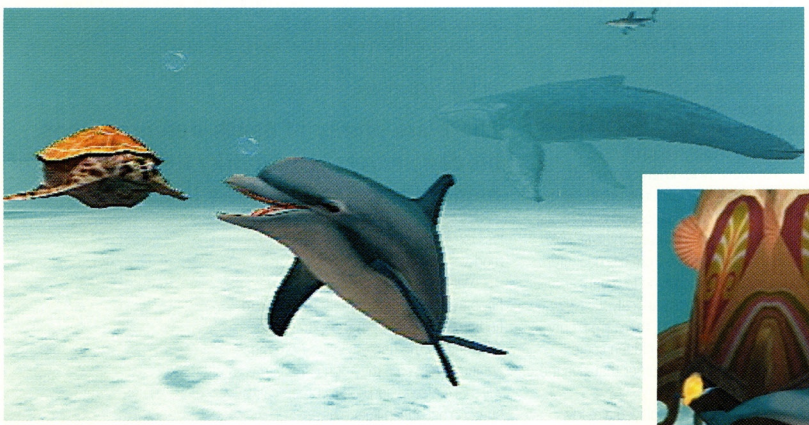
Ecco is aimed at two target audiences: the hardcore gamer who will focus on the game's action and adventure elements, and the casual gamer or non-gamer, who, Csaszar says, "will be attracted to the dolphin and the huge, beautiful underwater world." There will also be a "recording option" with which players can record their swimming and acrobatic skills on the VMS, then play it back later like a program on the Discovery channel.

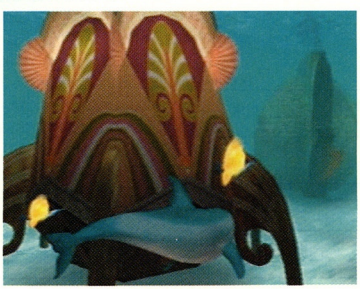
As in the original versions, the game will emphasize verbal communication between dolphins (the developer opted for subtitles to accompany animal sounds) and other benevolent creatures. Gameplay will also involve many chases and underwater fights, and unlike *Soldier of Fortune* (see page 56), it won't end in blood and gore.

In another surprising move, Appaloosa has hired sci-fi author David Brin to flesh out the story for *Ecco*. (Brin wrote the book that the Costner film *The Postman* was based on and has optioned his novel *Startide Rising* to Paramount.) Fittingly, Brin captures the essence of Ecco when he says: "I think Ecco's a character as brash and heroic as any you'll find. If we Earthlings (human and dolphin) ever get into real trouble, I sure hope Ecco will be around to save our skins."

Well, entertaining Dreamcast gamers will be enough for now. NG

Players can make a recording of their swimming and acrobatic skills, then play it back later like a program on the Discovery Channel





The realistic models are matched by their incredibly fluid animation

HYDRO THUNDER

Near arcade perfect, and just in time for launch

Every track is filled with personality and tiny details to uncover

Some of the drops in the game are truly insane; we wonder whether or not the track designers from *SF Rush: The Rock* had a hand in them

With more than a dozen vehicles and tracks, there is plenty of depth to the racing experience

Midway has been bullish in recent years about porting its hot arcade properties to the home, so it's no surprise that *Hydro Thunder* will be one of the first titles on Dreamcast. We've played near-final builds of the game, and we're happy to report that unless something terrible happens in the last few weeks of development, the port will be almost arcade perfect, with no loss in graphic detail or game quality. On the other hand, we are a bit dismayed by the fact that there seem to be few extra modes on top of what the arcade has to offer.

For those who haven't been fortunate enough to play the addictive arcade game, *Hydro Thunder* is a high-speed boat-racing game set in the near future: think *SF Rush* on water. Tracks range from the beautiful and serene Grand Canyon to a dark and desolate vision of post-apocalyptic New York. And, just like *Rush*, there are plenty of death-defying jumps, hidden secrets, and quirky touches of humor that give the game life.

The version we've played already lives up to its arcade counterpart in most respects. The sense of speed and tight physics are all in place, and graphics are on par with the original. Several new tracks are planned for Dreamcast, but exactly what can be added is limited by the short lead time available before the system launch. Everything standard must be done before these extras can be considered. What's most notably missing in the port is the four-player link-up, which has been replaced by an adequate (but far less exciting) split-screen two-player mode.

There are plenty of death-defying jumps, hidden secrets, and quirky little touches of humor that give the game life

With only a few months to go, we hope the development team manages to find time to squeeze in the extras to differentiate the home version from the arcade. But even if they don't, the game will make a solid addition to Dreamcast's burgeoning launch lineup as an example of its arcade power. NG

FORMAT
Dreamcast

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Eurocom

RELEASE DATE
September 9, 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

BLITZ 2000

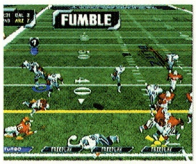
Can *Blitz 2000* go deep enough to ensure victory on Dreamcast?

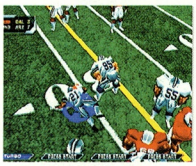
NFL *Blitz* can be described as a monster hit for Midway. With five versions already on the market (two arcade and three home versions), however, the license is perilously close to following its spiritual predecessor *NBA Jam* down the road to overexposure and obsolescence. With *NFL Blitz 2000* just around the corner for Dreamcast, can Midway prove it can keep its franchise alive without falling to the plague of redundancy?

While graphics aren't everything, Midway is counting on the fact that *Blitz 2000* is visually identical (complete with a 60fps frame rate) to the arcade version of *Blitz '99* to sell a lot of copies. Of course, in the yearly update, the front end has been changed around a bit, but there isn't anything that fans won't be comfortable with. The biggest change in the *2000* version is in the play selection, which has been upgraded substantially. It is now possible to customize your playbook of 27 plays by choosing from 45 pre-made plays or some that you've created yourself with the built-in offensive and defensive play editors. Add to all this the fact that each team will have its own customized playbook fitting its style of play, and there is suddenly some new depth for players to explore.

In addition, the teams will be updated to reflect the upcoming season's rosters. Not stopping there, Midway has also tweaked many of the star players so that they reflect more of their unique abilities in the game. For example, use Deion Sanders and you'll have a speed advantage over the standard players.

If Midway can continue to deepen its arcade conversions with these kinds of features, usually reserved for EA Sports titles, the company may be the first since 989 Studios to challenge EA's golden headlock on the world of console sports games. NG





The best part of *Blitz 2000* is its complete ignorance of any penalties

FORMAT
Dreamcast

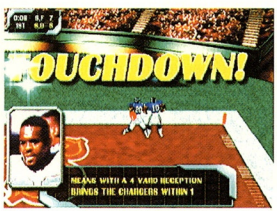
PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Avalanche

RELEASE DATE
September 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

Recreate the drama and horror of Garrison Hearst's leg breaking



The game even talks trash when you score so you don't have to

At any given point in a game, half of the players will be on the ground or otherwise involved in some "unsportmanslike conduct"

Special moves round out the boxers' arsenal, and while many are slow, they do lots of damage

The characters have lots of on-screen personality, but if you're cocky enough to use your taunts, you can expect to get clocked

READY 2 RUMBLE

Don't call it a comeback — Midway's gonna knock you out

Boxing games are few and far between — and given recent efforts on PlayStation like *Contender* and *Knockout Kings*, that's probably been a good thing. Instead of re-creating the fun and excitement of the sport, most recent games have been slow and boring.

Midway is poised to buck this trend with its first original title for Dreamcast (soon to be ported to PlayStation and N64). *Ready 2 Rumble* breaks all recent boxing-game tradition: it's fast, it's fun, and it looks great, with the humor of *PunchOut!* and the depth of a 3D fighter.

Dave Wagner, software engineer and co-designer on *R2R*, says that it's all in the basic design. "We looked at current boxing games, and we were a little disappointed," he admits as he points out the poor control and slow gameplay problems that have plagued recent attempts in the category. "Instead of approaching the game as a sim, we approached it as an arcade fighting game off the bat. We started off with the idea of *Tekken* because we like the speed and game style."

The fighting-game influences are obvious when you first pick up the controller — the fighters dance around the ring with a speed reminiscent of *Tobal 2*, and when you hit the buttons, you're instantly rewarded by a flurry of painful-looking hits. Players can execute combinations by chaining different punches together, and there are also variety of special punches that are executed by combining certain pad movements with button combinations.

Another aspect the team has taken from fighting games is the diverse rogues' gallery of characters. Each fighter has a unique personality and is meticulously detailed down to the smallest facial features (which change in-game to reflect damage done). In addition to differences in speed and power, fighting styles dramatically differ from fighter to fighter, varying from kung fu boxing (think Bruce Lee without the kicks) to traditional styles found in real life.

One issue the team has had to address, however, is the lack of moves inherent in boxing compared to a

The 3D camera makes control easy

FORMAT
Dreamcast, PSX, N64

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Midway (Dreamcast version only)

RELEASE DATE
Sept. 9, 1999 (Dreamcast)

ORIGIN
U.S.

Boxers are not only distinguished by size, weight, and look, but also by their unique fighting styles. Mastering each fighter's unique feel (such as the kung-fu action pictured above) is critical to being able to use them effectively in the ring. And unlike many boxing games, you can't bring all of the skills you learn on one boxer to another

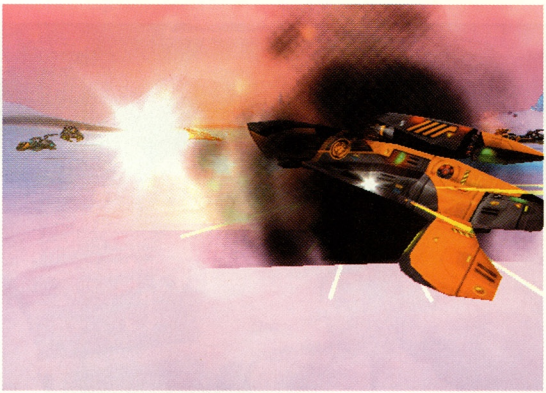
When characters get hit they react appropriately, snapping their heads back and bruising. Over time, you can get so battered that your face is a real mess

traditional fighting game. Wagner says his team hasn't found this to be a problem. "It makes the game tighter," he explains. "Now we can concentrate on punching without worrying about kicking and fireballs." In fact, Wagner argues, with the ability to block, bob, weave, and jump back, the gameplay is actually deeper than any fighting game on the market. While we wouldn't want to be in the room while Wagner argues this point with a die-hard *Virtua Fighter* fan, after some extended bouts with the game, we can't deny that there's an incredible amount of depth hidden just below the surface of the seemingly-simple interface.

Besides the action in the ring, the game also features an ambitious management mode which puts even its more sim-like competition down for the ten count. As a manager of fighters, you are given a certain amount of money with which you can sign prospects and build a gym for them to train in. After picking your training equipment, you actually participate in several related sub-games to make your boxers better before you schedule their fights. Each duel can either be for ranking or money — both of which are equally important, because to win the game you must have all three title belts at one time with boxers you control. If you don't balance your resources carefully, you may be forced to re-sign your boxers at much higher rates or, even worse, lose them altogether.

Unlike the current crop of boxing games, there is an incredible amount of depth behind the seemingly-simple interface

At this point, it looks like Midway's choice to gamble on *R2R* as a release title will pay off in spades. Its graphical flair never overshadows its deep gameplay, and it is one of the few truly original titles coming out this year to make Dreamcast shine. If the frenzied reaction at E3 and in the **Next Generation** offices is any gauge of the title's future success, Midway has a monster hit on its hands — and possibly the beginings of a franchise. We won't be surprised if we're previewing *Ready 2 Rumble: Hockey* this time next year... NG



A cleaner, easier-to-use interface has been implemented

New lighting techniques have been used to create realistic time-of-day modeling for day and night missions. And as Pandemic CEO Andrew Goldman says, "it is impossible to miss the new graphics engine"

BATTLEZONE II

Will the sequel to *Battlezone* be the break-out hit the original wasn't?

While last year's *Battlezone* remake pushed the emerging action/realtime strategy genre into the spotlight, there weren't as many takers as Activision had hoped. Fortunately for the company, there's a chance this refined sequel can change all that.

The story advances the game to modern day, after the NSDF and CCA (enemies in the first game) have allied to form the International Space Defense Force, monitoring the remaining alien technology. After picking up some weird messages from space, "you're part of the elite ISDF force sent out to see what's up," says Pandemic CEO Andrew Goldman. "On the front lines of the battlefield, you'll combat the revived alien technology, but you'll need to play to figure out who's behind it all."

The vehicular-based gameplay features two campaigns and is spread across six intergalactic worlds, but running around on the open battlefields will take a more prominent role. Once again, players can exit their vehicles to snipe enemies, but now it's on living battlefields, where the alien wildlife is prone to attacking the player. To wit, the designers have implemented new handheld weapons and power-ups such as bazookas and jet-packs to tempt players out of their vehicles.

But it's the new robust physics engine that really enhances gameplay. The hover vehicles, walkers, and treaded vehicles already have extremely distinct physics characteristics, and even vehicles from within the same family will have their own unique modeling. These physics additions don't just add to the action, according to Goldman — they also add to the strategy.

"If you are on an island, it would be foolish to build up a lot of treaded vehicles because they can't cross the water," says Goldman. "Or you may want to destroy a bridge spanning a canyon to prevent everything but flying units from getting to your base."

With the core technology in place from the first game, the *Battlezone II* focus has been on the gameplay. If Pandemic nails it (we're thinking it might), and the buzz gets out, a lot more people may (deservedly so) see this sequel than saw the first *Battlezone*. NG

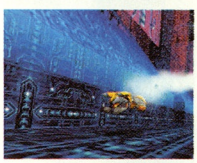
FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
Activision

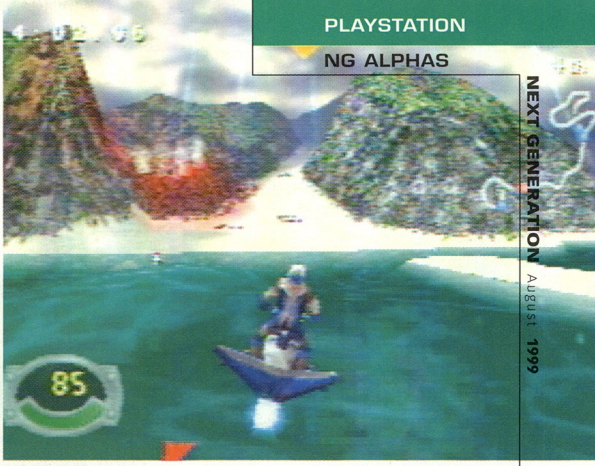
DEVELOPER
Pandemic Studios

RELEASE DATE
August

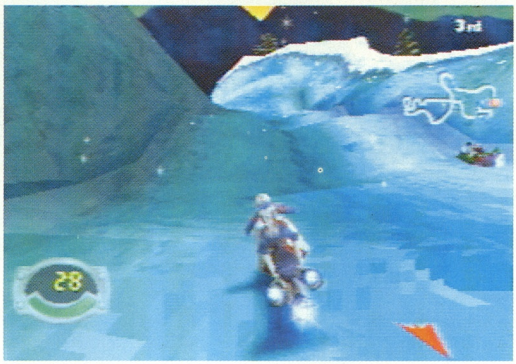
ORIGIN
U.S.



The game features 30 unique units including tanks, infantry, air support, mobile assault turrets, and one of Director George Collins' favorites — the kamikaze-like Mortarbike



The fact that your bike hovers means that you can drive over any surface, land or water. Different terrains and catching air change the "feeling" between your bike and the ground



This desert landscape is reminiscent of ***Episode I: Racer***. The game evokes that title's sense of speed, too

JET MOTO 3

Can a new developer bring the speed back to this rocketbike racing series?

FORMAT
PlayStation

PUBLISHER
989 Studios

DEVELOPER
Pacific Coast Power and Light

RELEASE DATE
Q3 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

Jet Moto has been a PlayStation stalwart since November 1996, when Singletrac and Sony launched the first version. Ostensibly an answer to Nintendo's groundbreaking *Wave Race*, *Jet Moto* broke its own ground, bringing an entirely new racing experience to PlayStation that combined speed, stunts, and jumping in a way that was not only accessible, but utterly absorbing.

Newcomer developer Pacific Coast Power and Light (also working on THQ's *Road Rash 64*) has started this third version from scratch, and while it's clearly a continuation of the series, the new engine brings with it a technological boost and adds features.

"The graphics are a lot better than in *One* or *Two*," says Lead Programmer Eu-Ming Lee, explaining that new dynamic lighting, colored fog, and particle system effects will be used. And, Lee adds, "the game runs faster, and as a result, plays faster."

Undoubtedly, as *Jet 3* will likely be locked in at 30fps. With the faster pace, the game expands on the huge stunts and floating jumps of previous games, and brings with it a more visceral racing experience, accentuating tight turns and fast straights.

"We've also added the bunny hop," Lee explains, "and for certain terrain, it's helpful for you to hop over small obstacles. A little hop prevents you from slowing down as much as you do when you catch air. It's new, and it makes this version feel different."

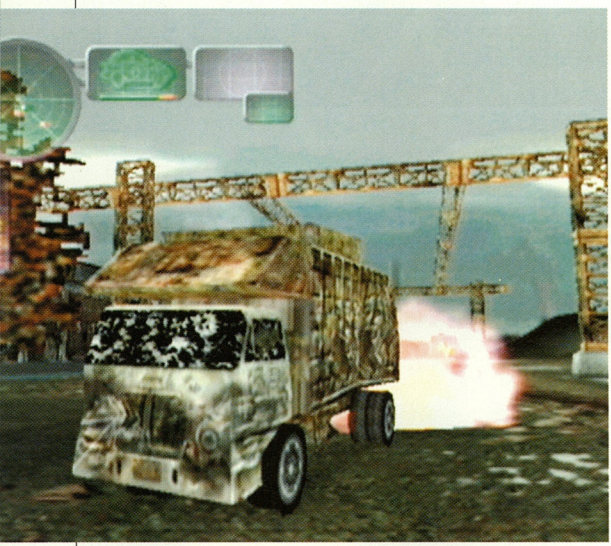
There are 16 tracks to choose from initially, with one-player practice, single race, and season modes as well as a two-player head-to-head mode. *Jet Moto 3* also features a freestyle stunt mode that becomes accessible to players who successfully complete the season mode on expert level.

Considering they started without one line of code, the team has built a competitive product late in PlayStation's lifecycle, and hopefully the team can put the same polish into the final gameplay. With *WipeOut 3* and numerous other racers preparing for fall releases, it's going to need every edge. NG

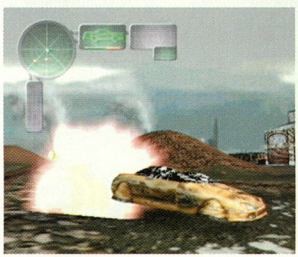
Environments change rather dramatically — a downtown view [top] actually ends up in a subway

VIGILANTE 8: SECOND OFFENSE

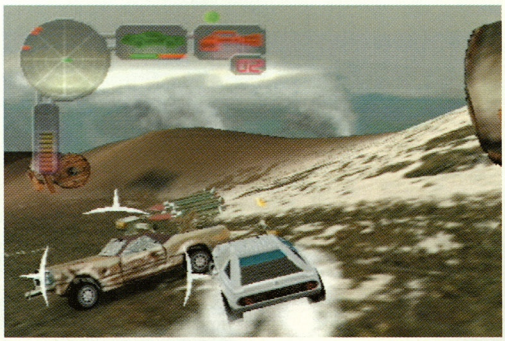
'70s muscle cars take on some bad muthas from the future? Darn straight



Dump trucks can become lethal when put into the right hands. Strap a couple of missiles to the roof and get ready to take out the trash



As you would expect, the Dreamcast version of the game features higher resolutions and framerates



A Pinto is hardly the car we'd want to be strapped into during a firefight

The PSX version has 2-player head to head, but for 4-player action you'll need a DC or N64

Vigilante 8 was originally conceived as a console version of *Interstate '76*, but it played much more like *Twisted Metal* than its PC brethren. This shake-up in gameplay gave *V8* a wider audience as console fans snatched it up looking for something to fill the void in car-combat releases. Now, over a year later, the developers at Luxoflux are hard at work on the sequel, which already looks promising.

One area where *V8* didn't follow in *Twisted Metal*'s footsteps was in its storyline, which actually had some purpose. In *V8: Second Offense*, also, story matters: the game picks up the thread of Slick Clyde after his triumph in the first game. Clyde has taken control of the world's oil supply through his affiliation with the evil corporation OMAR, which means that he rules the world with the exception of the United States. The game then fast-forwards to the future, in which a 70-year-old Clyde, infuriated by his inability to take over the U.S., steals a time machine so that he can go back to 1977 and take revenge on the Vigilantes.

"This gives us the ability to stay in the '70s and keep the '70s vibe," explains Peter Morawiec, creative director at Luxoflux. "But we can also bring in all these modern things without being tied down to '70s technology." This new-age technology is readily apparent from the car selection screen, which contains such vehicles as a hovercar and a futuristic three-wheeled cycle. (Fans of the original

FORMAT
N64, PlayStation, DC

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Luxoflux

RELEASE DATE
Fall 1999

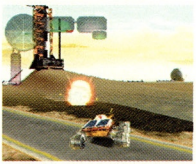
ORIGIN
U.S.

The N64 version is a little less detailed than its brethren, but the gameplay is just as solid

need not worry: there is also a heavy mix of seventies vehicles like a Pacer and an El-Camino-esque vehicle.)

Luxoflux is determined to do this sequel right. While the theme of the game may be the same, everything has been changed around. "We're trying for more variety in the sorts of cars so it's not just four-wheeled vehicles," stresses Morawiec as he demos such new vehicles as a semi with a trailer (watch out for jackknifing) and a six-wheeled buggy with four-wheel steering. Among the 18 vehicles, none are repeats from the first game — and while some of the old characters will make appearances, they will all be in new cars.

One area that hasn't been changed much is the rock-solid gameplay of the first game. There is only one new regular weapon, a flamethrower, and the biggest change appears to be that all of the weapons have a new secret attack to bring the total of each one to three. "I think the core remains essentially the same," admits Morawiec when confronted with the fact that the gameplay has stayed so close to the original — but given the quality of the first, we can see why the team is happy with the way the game is going. The biggest gameplay change is the addition of three ways to "transform" your car to better fit your environment. Pick up the correct power-up and you can add skis to your car for the snow, propellers and floats for the water, and some hoverjets to take to the air.



The single-player game is much more plot driven than its predecessor

The only area that has been significantly changed from the first (besides the entirely original array of vehicles and arenas) is the structure of the quests. Level locations now span the entire country and take place anywhere from the bayou to the desert. Goals have been enhanced so that now there can be several different waves of enemies to fight. You might even have to assist NPCs or defend a convoy.

Of course it goes without saying that, with the Dreamcast version in the works, this will be the most spectacular-looking car-combat game yet. Surprisingly, however, there have been advancements on the PlayStation and N64 versions of the games that bring them up to the standards considered to be "state of the art." Especially cool for the hyper-observant are all of the little details that are already in the game like brake lights, smoke from squealing tires, and some nice specular highlighting on the cars.

It goes without saying that the Dreamcast version of *V8* will be the most spectacular-looking car-combat game yet

There are still a few months left before the game debuts, and the nine-man team at Luxoflux is already crunching to make sure that all three versions come out close to each other. With little in the way of competition this holiday season, it looks like the second offense will be just as strong as the first. NG

A lunar explorer fighting a Town Car? It seems strange to us that a group from the future wouldn't rather have a tank

TOY COMMANDER

No Cliché's first Dreamcast title could prove to be this year's most refreshing

When Sega bought Adeline Software over a year ago (re-dubbing it No Cliché), it was obvious that the company's first title under Sega's banner wouldn't be another *Twinsen* game, but rather an entirely new and original title. No Cliché has been very secretive about *Toy Commander*, and its obscure working title, *Gutherman*, didn't clarify things either. Nearing two years in development, Sega waited for the recent Electronic Entertainment Expo to unveil a game that's a surprisingly quirky and dramatic departure from the French developer's previous works.

Not unlike 3DO's *Army Men* franchise (in fact, suspiciously close to 3DO's *Army Men* franchise), the game puts the player into a world where toys wage war. The battles take place in a large house inhabited by a young boy named Guthy (a name likely to changed in the U.S. release) and his large toy collection. The conflict arises when the boy's teddy bear, Hugolin, decides to challenge the boy's position as "toy commander" and forms an alliance with seven boss characters to defeat him. Each of the bosses (among them a robot, clown, etc.) has filled an area of the house with hordes of plastic soldiers, planes, ships, and other toys going berserk.

You must restore order to seven areas of the house, and each area features six missions. The 42 missions will range from rather straightforward car races to strategic and action-packed military missions. In certain missions, the player will need to steer an unarmed truck through big constructs and

The conflict arises when the boy's teddy bear decides to challenge the boy's position as "toy commander"

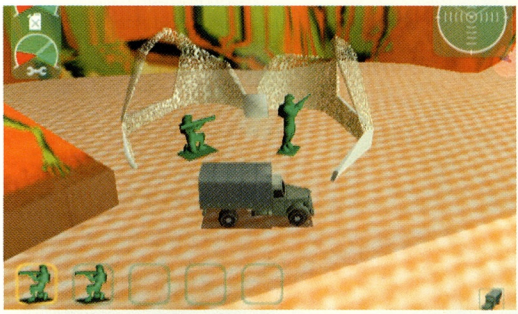
FORMAT
Dreamcast/PC

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
No Cliché

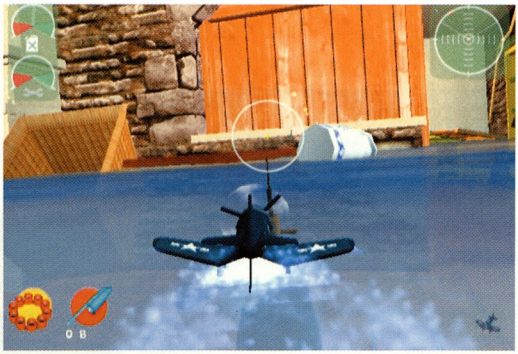
RELEASE DATE
September 1999/ Q1 2000

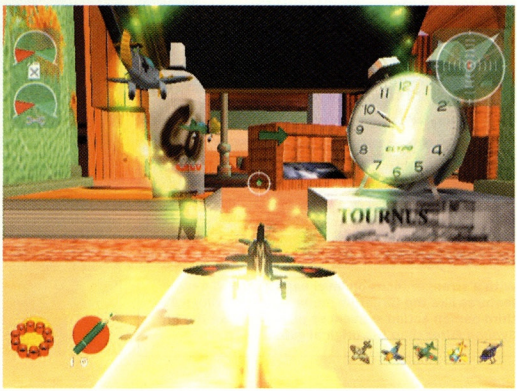
ORIGIN
France



The soldiers will be able to perform group attacks and tactical maneuvers — the defenseless truck must be both protected and steered out of trouble

Lighting and other environmental effects are very impressive and add life to the plastic world





strategically drop off (and pick up) plastic soldiers for battle. In other levels, it's possible to switch between ground-based and air-based vehicles, for example, to defeat a kangaroo dressed as Godzilla.

Except for the game's movie sequences, Guthy does not appear in the game itself and is not shown manipulating the toys onscreen.

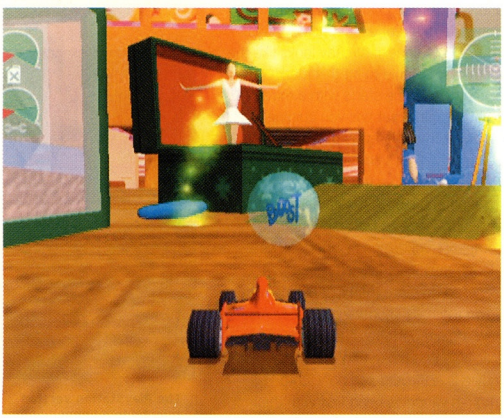
"That would have looked a bit odd, wouldn't it?" Frédérick Raynal, the game's creative director, asks. But Raynal's team isn't afraid of wacky ideas. In what constitutes a rather original take on the now-standard "water level," Hugolin and his minions have flooded the kitchen and nearby rooms, forcing the player to move by plane or ship. Even in the early version presented at E3, the control for each of these vehicles and characters seemed very instinctive, and it doesn't take much practice before one is able to fly through the house with ease, performing the kind of aerobatics required for sophisticated attacks.

"*Toy Commander* is not really a kid's game, though," Raynal explains. "It's rather aimed at ages 15 and up. Controlling the planes and following missions is still a little too hard for my six-year-old son. But then he went and beat the whole No Cliché team in a *Power Stone* contest."

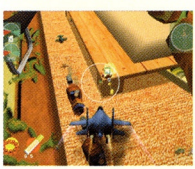
Time will also play a crucial part in completing the game, and Raynal promises an entire hidden area if certain times and goals are met. As for multiplayer modes, up to four players will be able to compete in a split-screen mode that offers games such as capture-the-flag and cat-and-mouse. Unfortunately, though, network options will only be added to the Japanese version, which will be released later this year. According to Raynal, Sega may release a gold version with network support in Europe and the U.S. later on. A PC version of *Toy Commander* is also in development for an early 2000 release.

And while No Cliché is putting the finishing touches on *Toy Commander*, the company is already working on its second Dreamcast game, the "survival horror" action-adventure *Agartha*, which should hit shelves late next year. Raynal promises it to be "very dark, gory, and with a very high graphical quality."

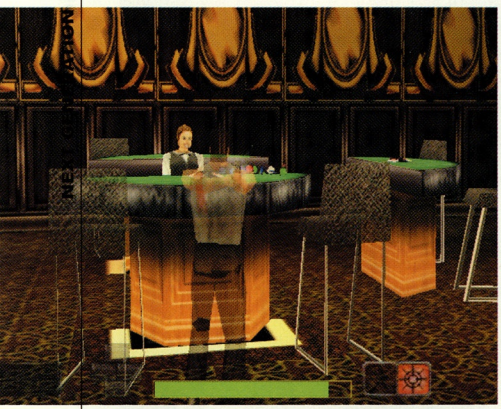
So much for colorful toys and cuddly enemies. NG



For the 10% of the audience that *doesn't* like to blow things up, developer No Cliché has added weapons-free racing



Available vehicles include tanks, planes, ships, and various cars



With a stronger focus on level variety and all-new features like the targeting mode, *Die Hard Trilogy 2*'s third-person action sequences play more like the hit *Syphon Filter* than the original game

The game levels are the most interactive we've seen. Shoot a terrorist in the knee and he falls in pain, shoot a gas tank and... boom

DIE HARD TRILOGY 2

Ever wonder what happened after *Die Hard 3*? Evidently there are always more terrorists

If there is anything we've learned from the *Die Hard* trilogy of movies, it's that John Maclaine, cop extraordinaire, is always going to find himself in the thick of trouble. In *Die Hard Trilogy 2*, the story leads off after *Trilogy*'s finale with Maclaine once again finding himself in a bad situation: he goes out to Vegas to visit his friend Kenny Sinclair at a prison-privatizing party (evidently, it's a prestigious thing). Soon enough, terrorists show up and take the people at the party hostage, forcing Maclaine to fight his way out. This is where the game begins — it's up to you to not only escape from the prison but to figure out the terrorists' insidious scheme and stop it if you can.

The story unfolds in-game, and like the first game, you must play through stages of third-person action, shooting, and driving to get to the end. Now, with the addition of a storyline, the different types of gameplay segue into each other and you never know which type of game you will be playing next. While the gameplay of each engine is similar in theme to the original game, they have been improved significantly. "With a sequel, you're always being careful about how much you're changing," explains Gary Sheinwald, the senior producer on the game. "You don't want to change too much, so that people that liked the first one won't like the sequel, and you want to change it enough so that it's a different experience."

At 50% done, it already looks like the team may be able to hit this mark exactly. The game starts with a third-person engine that has you guiding Maclaine through levels from a perspective that's somewhere between *Tomb Raider* and a top view. With the addition of a plot to the game, the designers have added some more complex level designs which look as though they'll actually challenge the player to do more than just having to run down the halls shooting copiously. Also new are a repertoire of moves for Maclaine that make him that much more movie-like. Players can now jump through windows head first with their guns blazing, stop and look around corners, or even advance slowly with

The PlayStation version may be in a lower resolution, but it still manages to look good

FORMAT
PSX/PC

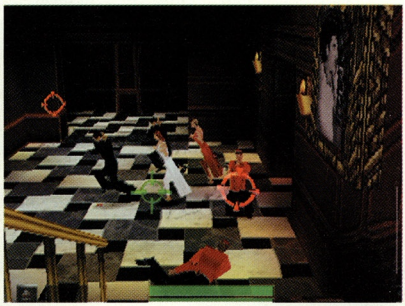
PUBLISHER
Fox Interactive

DEVELOPER
Nspace

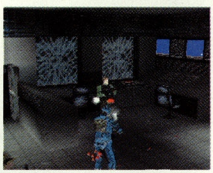
RELEASE DATE
Fall 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

Succesfully navigating the light-gun mode doesn't require sharp aim. You must also have the discipline to hold your fire as hostages scurry out of the way



While it is possible to play each type of game individually in the arcade mode, the real challenge comes from running the gauntlet of all three while in the story mode



their gun down in the characteristic style of the movie.

The attention to detail adds an air of authenticity that the original somewhat lacked. "In the first *DHT*, the gun game had a very destructible environment, and we're trying to bring that to all three games," says Sheinwald as he uses Maclaine to shoot out windows, set off fire alarms, and generally cause mayhem in his environment. Terrorists catch fire and run screaming toward him only to be put out by the water from the ceiling extinguishers — they are then taken out by a clean head shot with the new-and-improved aiming feature.

These details carry over into the gun part of the game, which is equally improved with a robust new graphics engine that displays polygonal enemies instead of the two-dimensional baddies of the first game. As promised, everything we could think of could be shot (including hostages — oops!) and there was just as much fun to be had looking for secrets as there was shooting the enemies. The concept of bosses has also made its way into the game, and a character that you fight in the gun mode can run away to fight you again in a different mode.

Unfortunately, as of press time, the third engine (the driving engine) was the least completed, and the levels featured no real detail. Fans of the first game will be pleased to find out that the ability to shave some time off your pursuit by running onto the sidewalks has been kept intact, complete with the windshield wipers that clean the blood off after plowing through a particularly busy area.

Terrorists catch fire and run screaming toward you only to be put out by the water from the ceiling extinguishers

Overall, it looks as if *DHT 2* is on the right track to being another hit for Fox. While there are fewer levels than in the first, Sheinwald promises that the game will be "much bigger overall," and with that promise comes a level of storytelling and level design which will pull you even more into the mythos. Yippie kai ay, uhhh.... guys. NG

The pacing of the game mimics the non-stop action of the films perfectly

Real *Quake* skins can be used to outfit your Sims. As you can see here, they don't spend *all* their time deathmatching — they have their more domestic side

When your Sims show some skin, the game keeps things clean with witness-protection-style pixelation. Sometimes your Sims will appeal to the player for help — here, the one fanning her armpits needs a shower, while the other one needs to relax in front of the television

THE SIMS

Will *The Sims* do for human nature what *SimCity* did for urban planning?

Will Wright's *SimCity* series was the foundation upon which Maxis built its reputation. The franchise has spawned a number of in-house projects (*SimAnt*, *SimIsle*, and *SimCopter*, to name a few) and copycat games from other publishers. None of these come close to having the impact and longevity of the original, however, Wright's latest project, *The Sims*, could very well overshadow the gold mine that is *SimCity*.

The Sims started seven years ago as a home architectural simulation and evolved over time into a complete behavioral simulation of individuals in a neighborhood. At its core, *The Sims* still contains the architectural simulation, whereby players can choose a lot and design a home. But players must also design the home's inhabitants — and that's where things get interesting.

Wright purposefully avoided creating human simulations until now, but he feels it is an idea whose time has come. "With *SimCity*, it was easy to put up plausible traffic patterns. I mean, it's hard to argue with statistical layers. But when you watch a person walk around on the screen, we are so attuned to human behavior that it is very easy to pick out an inappropriate decision."

The key technology in *The Sims* is what Wright calls a "behavioral engine." Ditching the classical AI approaches where the emphasis is on creating smart characters, *The Sims* uses a distributed behavior model where objects and environment have behavior embedded in them — the file for the model of a TV, for example, contains all the instructions for watching it and the conditions under which a Sim would want to. In addition to creating believable interactions, the side-effect benefit of this model is that new objects can be dropped into the mix without the need to make people in the game any smarter.

"I can drop a soccer ball into the game and it will contain all the rules for soccer, along with the associated sounds

You can choose career paths for your Sims ranging from a military job to a life of crime

FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Maxis

RELEASE DATE
Winter 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

Build a relationship and you may get to propose. If the Sim says yes, you get married on the spot

Sims left to their own devices will cause unpleasant living environments. Witness the piles of refuse, uncleaned bathroom, flies buzzing around half-eaten pizzas, and dying houseplants as the bachelor orders another pizza

You distribute points among five traits: neatness, laziness, playfulness, extrovertedness, and niceness

and animations," says Wright. "People could, say, download the soccer ball from the web and their Sims would automatically go outside to play soccer when they become bored."

From the get-go, *The Sims* is a unique game with clever concepts. Its load/save screen is a ten-lot suburban neighborhood, and each family that occupies a house is the representation of a saved game. Once you build a house and create a family, you can actually invite your neighboring saved-game families over for dinner.

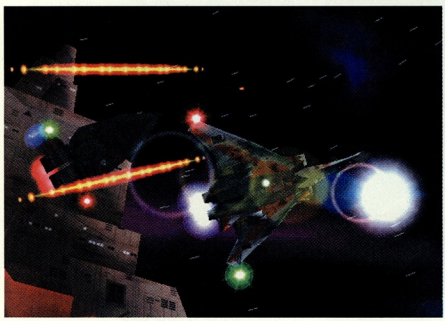
Not unlike an RPG, to create people in the game you must choose the sex, skin color, and age. In addition, you distribute points among five personality traits: neatness, extrovertedness, playfulness, laziness, and niceness. Wright suggests balancing out your families for best results. A skin editor is already available and eager users are creating customized Sims by the hundreds. And in an unlikely twist, the editor will enable users to import *Quake II* skins directly.

Characters in the game will initially need to be babied, fulfilling their basic needs for food, comfort, and cleanliness — and yes, you will need to potty-train your fledgling Sims. But as you provide a better environment, their autonomous decision making improves. At that point, you can work on higher needs such as careers and relationships.

Wright wants to leave the game open-ended like *SimCity*, but the measure of success in the Sims is prosperity. You're going for the big house on the hill, a lot of friends, and a successful job, but that doesn't mean you must be a doctor or lawyer to win. In fact, you can choose a life of crime and retire as a successful criminal mastermind.

The Sims turned a lot of heads at E3, and if it continues on its current path, someone at Electronic Arts will have the pleasure of telling his boss, "I told you so." NG

Although combat is exciting, players will need to trade cargo to upgrade weaponry



The *Jump Runner* universe is home to numerous gangs and empires. "Hero" Ethan Fall comes under attack by everyone from small-time pirates to intergalactic warlords

JUMP RUNNER

Can a space-based combat-and-trading game keep a newly independent developer going?

Developer Simis had long been known for its sims, but after a management buyback from Eidos last year, it was clear that the newly independent company would have to diversify to survive. So now, a year later, two studios exist: Simis still specializes in PC-based sims but also runs Glass Ghost.

So it's no surprise that its first project, *Jump Runner*, is described in grand terms. Obvious comparisons such as *Elite* and *Privateer* join elements of *Grand Theft Auto*, *Dungeon Keeper*, and *Final Fantasy*. Set hundreds of years into the future, its eponymous jump runner, Ethan Fall, is a small-time smuggler who agrees to carry a mysterious package. Before he can learn its destination, however, his contact is assassinated and he flees. A cut scene then shows six bounty hunters being sent to recover the package, and they act as end-of-level bosses throughout the game.

This is typical of the way the plot is structured: you travel around sprawling galaxies, accepting bread-and-butter missions to build up resources. Unlike *Privateer*, you can own more than one ship and swap weapons. Progress is strictly controlled by plot missions, and clues about the mysterious package are slowly uncovered en route.

If you rip off a valuable cargo from one gang, you shouldn't get into too much trouble with its arch-enemies

Each new level is determined by the success or failure of previous missions. For example, if you rip off a valuable cargo from one gang, you shouldn't get into too much trouble with its arch-enemies.

As James Brooksby, project director, explains, "*Jump Runner* is for Dreamcast and PC, so it has to be designed so that anybody can pick it up, and as a player, you need to feel you are somebody." All the trading is driven by interacting with other characters. "We wanted to get away from mission briefings and introduce story elements, something like *Final Fantasy*," Brooksby continues.

Jump Runner may only be halfway complete, but a small-scale multiplayer universe has already been successfully tested. The final version will support a persistent Internet environment for PC and, potentially, Dreamcast as well. But for Simis co-founder Ian Baverstock, this is more than just another game: "Glass Ghost is focused on games, and *Jump Runner* will be the one to show off what we can do." NG

The game mixes the adrenaline rush of space combat with the capitalism of smuggling, with a story driven by your success or failure

FORMAT
PC, Dreamcast

PUBLISHER
TBA

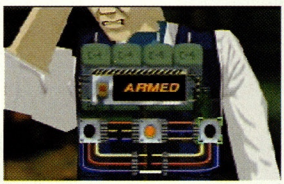
DEVELOPER
Glass Ghost

RELEASE DATE
December 1999

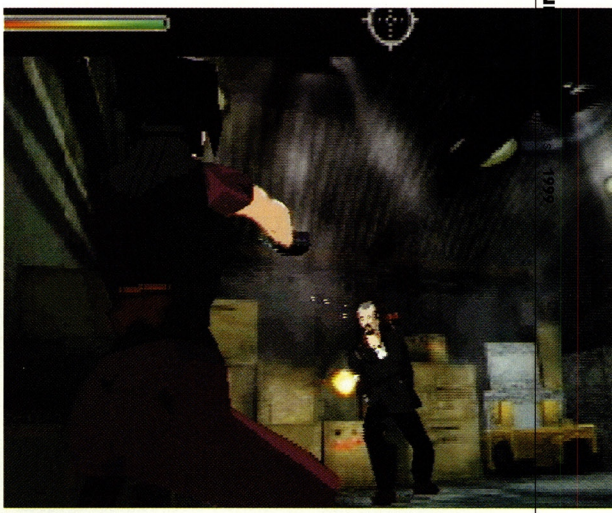
ORIGIN
U.K.

FEAR FACTOR

Anime meets *Resident Evil* — can Kronos make it work?



Does anyone bother making games without tough chicks anymore?



Believe it or not, all the characters are actually 3D models — they just *look* like anime cartoons

It remains to be seen whether Kronos can out-*Resident Evil* Capcom, but at least it's ambitious

Fear Factor is unique not just for what it's attempting, but for what its designers chose not to attempt. A character-based action/adventure game, *Fear Factor* uses streaming FMV backgrounds with 3D models for its main characters and foregrounds. The twist is that the 3D characters are rendered out with a special technique that gives them a decidedly fluid 2D anime look.

Producer John Patten, who worked on Activision's *Battlezone* and *Ultima IX Ascension*, explains this decision. "While I respect what the 3D characters out there have done for the game industry, they're all starting to look the same. They're almost becoming cliché."

Patten's intention? To "amp-up the good stuff from *Resident Evil* and the *Alone in The Dark* series." Indeed, Kronos' pre-rendered FMV backgrounds move simultaneously with the camera around the 3D characters and objects. In addition, there are invisible polygons that track the position of some objects in the background, enabling the player to interact with them.

With hundreds of pre-rendered backgrounds for hundreds of screen views, *Fear Factor* will occupy a whopping four CDs. The gameplay is split into sections, where you play one of three characters. Following the current trend, one character is a beautiful and deadly woman who comfortably totes two guns.

In addition to the traditional projectile and grenade arsenal, some interesting hand-to-hand weapons include a garroting wire, a meat hook, a power saw, and a surgical blade. However, while combat plays a big part in the game, it's balanced with adventure-game-style puzzles with contextual clues.

"While I respect what the 3D characters out there have done for the game industry, they're all starting to look the same"

John Patten, producer

Kronos promises that the game will be fast-paced and that the action and puzzles will be integrated into the story. The new technologies employed in the game are ambitious, and the few early screens **Next Generation** saw demonstrated a command of the new tools. As a graphics effects house, Kronos' background lies more in art than in game design, and only time will tell if the design team's daring attempt to be different will result in exceptional playability. NG

FORMAT
PlayStation

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Kronos Digital Entertainment

RELEASE DATE
Q4 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

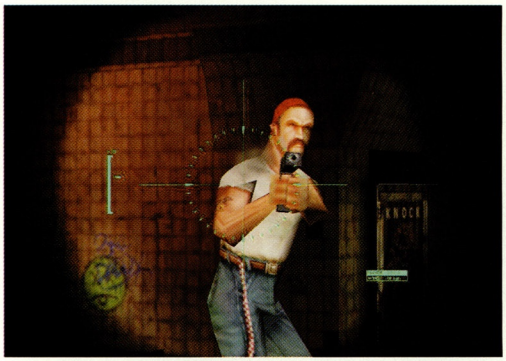
Think *Quake III: Arena* is the only PC shooter of 1999? Raven's about to surprise you

Not long ago, *Quake III* designer Tim Willits told **Next Generation** that it was not his goal to recreate the mundane world. While Id's levels take game environments to the extreme, there's nothing mundane about Raven Software's *Soldier of Fortune* — a first-person thriller set in real-world environments and loosely based on the military magazine of the same name.

In *Soldier of Fortune* (*SOF*), the player assumes the role of a modern-day soldier-for-hire, out to prevent a fanatical mercenary faction from securing nuclear arms. The single-player game takes place in nineteen locations on five continents, including Iraq, New York City, Uganda, Kosovo, Colombia, and Russia, just to name a few. The locations are visited throughout 30 missions with assignments that include hostage rescues, escorting and reconnaissance scenarios, and plenty of assassinations and vehicle destruction. Raven maintains the story has been written by a "well-known, published writer," who has had to remain nameless due to contractual issues at press time.

"Quite simply," says Eric Biessman, project lead at Raven Software, "atmosphere is the key to what we're trying to build here. *Half-Life* raised the bar for this kind of game, and we're going to take it to the next level."

Coincidentally, *SOF* is also based on a *Quake* engine, but the team at Raven prefers to call it "*Quake* 2.9." Like Valve, Raven has added quite a bit of proprietary technology to its engine, including 32-bit color, curved surfaces, and highly-detailed textures. At the heart of the modification is GHOUL, a rendering



Unlike *Half-Life*, there will be many different-looking NPCs in *Soldier of Fortune*. Raven's proprietary GHOUL system allows for an easy mix-and-match of various physical traits

FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Raven Software

RELEASE DATE
November 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

Shades of *GoldenEye*? Sniper scopes, throwing knives... heck, there are even enemies hiding out in the toilet stalls

Yeah, it's hyper violent all right, but what did you expect from a game licensed after a right-wing, pro-gun, survivalist magazine like *Soldier of Fortune*? A butterfly-collecting simulator?

Shooting a player in the face or gut may yield a gushing stream of blood to pour out of the wound. However, Raven has added a parental lock for concerned parents, which can turn off the gore

system that allows for location-based per-poly collision detection. Characters are made up of 26 damage points (or "gore zones," as Raven puts it), so it's possible to shoot an enemy in the arm, the legs, the head, or even the groin. Not only can players shoot a weapon out of someone's hands, but with the sniper mode on, it is possible to knock the glasses off someone's face if you're a good enough shot. While this is not unlike the location-based damage seen in Rare's *GoldenEye*, it's far more graphic. *SOF* is truly gory — players can fully dismember limbs or decapitate a baddie with one blast from the right weapon.

As the game takes place in modern-day society, all of the weapons are based on real ones, although Raven has changed the names of each for licensing reasons. This may be beneficial given the current climate surrounding the videogame industry. Finger-pointing politicians aside, players who are mature enough to handle the subject matter can expect an array of sniper rifles, semi- and fully-automatic pistols, and an assortment of peripheral weapons such as grenades and bombs.

All the animations and the many scripted sequences are motion-captured for convincing realism. NPCs will walk around and go about their daily lives while others may request to join in on the fight. Dynamic music, by way of compressed WAV files, will change depending on the scene and what's happening on screen.

On the multiplayer front, there will be six modes of play for LAN or Internet gamers. Along with the regular deathmatch, capture the flag, and king of the hill variations, *SOF* offers a couple new twists. In assassin mode, the goal is to frag the target player, and then the killer becomes the hunted. The player who can stay alive longest and be the target of all players is the one to win. In arsenal mode, the winner will be the player capable of killing using one of each of the weapons provided.

With the sniper mode on, it's possible to knock the glasses off someone's face if you're a good enough shot

If all goes well, *Soldier of Fortune* should be out by November of this year. It will require, at the minimum, a P200 with a Voodoo 1 card. Let's just hope Activision doesn't rush this potentially groundbreaking shooter out the door prematurely (a la *Sin* or *Quake II*) because it certainly is one of the most promising PC action titles in some time. NG

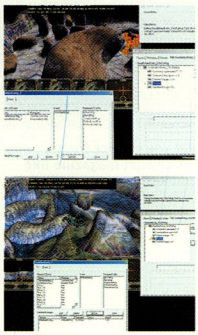
In multiplayer games, server hosts will have the option to scale the effect of bullets, so players won't die from a single shot to the head, as in the single-player game

EVOLVA

Sometimes a great game comes out of nowhere. Here's one that not only looks like nothing else, but plays like nothing else

If Computer Artworks does anything well, it's push the technology envelope, add originality, and surprise people with the result. In 1994, its *Organic Art* mixed an easy-to-use interface with high-end graphics, enabling you to "breed" shapes and create organic images as screensavers (see "Artificial Life," **NG 23**). The media went ballistic, and it quickly crossed into the worlds of fashion and club culture — not bad for a project that started out as a vehicle to develop 3D technology for games.

In the years since, the company has been quiet. Odd details surfaced about *Evolva*, but little of real substance. "We got our heads down and did some really good work," says Computer Artworks President William Latham. "There's always a danger when developers start shouting about stuff before they've done anything." So for two years, they've been plugging away designing *Evolva*'s code in-house, and all of it, from the 3D engine to the physics, the AI code, and the in-game editor, is modular and reusable for future titles.



Like many games of late, *Evolva* will feature its own level editor

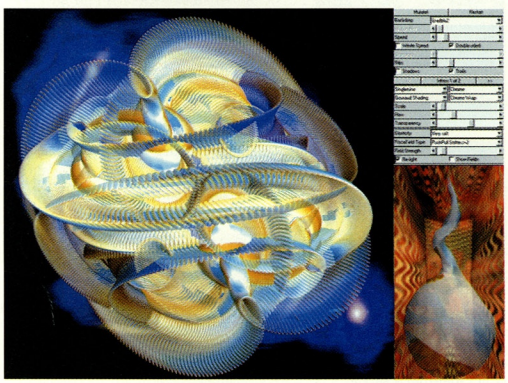
The game's premise is that mankind has mastered genetic engineering, the result of which is the genohunter, a basic military unit. As commander of a genohunter squad, you're deployed to a planet where a parasite has landed and spawned an army of guardians to defend itself. The job is to wipe them out before the entire universe is infected.

"There's always a danger when developers start shouting about stuff before they've done anything" **William Latham,** president, Computer Artworks

Computer Artworks is striving to balance innovation with traditional gaming staples. The game uses a third-person perspective, but gives you control of up to four playable characters at once. The basic game structure — killing aliens — is nothing new, but instead of the usual power-ups and additional weapons, characters are upgraded genetically.

Genohunters absorb genes from dead enemies to acquire their abilities. Each set of genes controls a range of mutations, from growing enormous claws or spore guns to more mundane abilities such as

Given Computer Artworks' background in artificial-life programs, it's not surprising that the enemies have an organic look (with the possible exception of the rocket launching and fire breathing)



Computer Artworks made a splash a couple of years back with *Organic Art*, a mathematically complex and eye-grabbing screensaver

FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
Computer Artworks

DEVELOPER
Interplay/Virgin

RELEASE DATE
Q4 1999

ORIGIN
U.K.

Don't look for power-ups in this game — your characters gain abilities by stealing genes

night vision, long jumps, or climbing. They even change their external appearance.

Starting with one genohunter, additional units are added, up to four. Any genohunter can be played as the main character, with the other three views displayed at the bottom of the screen. "On the first level, you just control one genohunter and get into the *Heretic II* style of gameplay," explains Producer Vince Farquharson. "By level four you've got *Syndicate Wars* multiple-selection stuff."

Much of the game will be played from the view of one of the genohunters, but there is a top-down view for the more tactical elements of gameplay. "At one end you've got *Quake*," says Technical Director Mark Atkinson. "At the other you've got *Command & Conquer*. It was a fundamental decision to go in-between and focus on this unexplored area of small-scale tactical play."

If you're going to have autonomous genohunters, their AI must be good. It is, but they're not the only ones who act intelligently — all the creatures exhibit sophisticated behavior. Using complex code, each creatures is controlled by 20 different factors, including territorial preferences, health levels, and the proximity of friends and enemies, while a fuzzy logic controller decides overall behavior. For example, an aggressive guardian low on health may either go into a dying frenzy or turn tail and run. But, if it finds another group of guardians, it could become aggressive again.

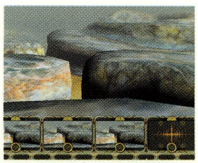
The creatures have basic memory and mapping functions, too. "If you run away, guardians will see where you ran, and since that's the last point they saw you, they'll remember something was there," says Farquharson. "Often they'll come up and investigate the last place they saw you." There's also a messaging system so they can communicate with each other, giving the distinct impression you're fighting a well-organized and intelligent enemy. It certainly seems to have the makings of a great game.

Combat is fairly simple to control and genohunter AI keeps the squad together, which is good considering the fearsome opponents on the planet

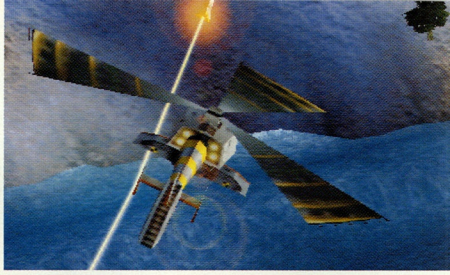
Indeed, recent rumors suggest that *Evolva* will be a launch title for PlayStation 2 in Europe. "We've definitely positioned ourselves to be right at the cutting edge, so that we're a desirable developer for people like Sony," confides Latham. "We have an ambitious business plan, and the game obviously lends itself to that platform as we have written neat, transferable technology." He remarks, somewhat ambiguously, "You can draw your own conclusions." NG

"We have an ambitious business plan, and the game obviously lends itself to [PlayStation 2]..."

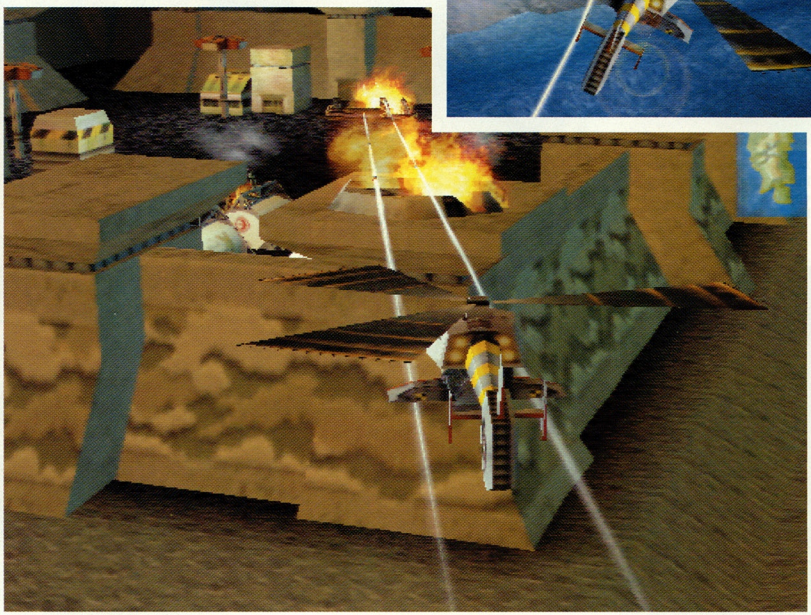
William Latham, president



One thing is for sure: *Evolva*'s oddly pretty environments don't look quite like any other game that's come before



Sure, it has its strategy component, too, but it's clear that *Hostile Waters* won't skimp when it comes to the seat-of-your-pants action department, either



You want multiple vehicles? You want multiple terrains? Done.

HOSTILE WATERS

Can Rage's next project, a thinking man's *Incoming*, compete with heavy hitters like *Homeworld* and *Battlezone 2*?

U.K.-based Rage Software turned heads with the amazing pyrotechnics showcased in its PC shooter *Incoming*, but its partnership with a small publisher (Xicat) led to the game's widespread unavailability in the U.S. Having proven its graphics prowess, however, Rage hopes to capture the praise of the hardcore gaming audience with *Hostile Waters*.

When Rage drew up the game's strategy-action design doc, it started with the concept of updating the classic game *Carrier Command*, giving it the full 3D-accelerator treatment. Producer Julian Widdows notes, "Because our game is based in a realistic environment, we can't get away with the bright lights and flashes of our sister products. We have to be a little more subtle and delicate, and this takes a lot of time and effort." So much time and effort, in fact, that the game has a dedicated "special effects" team in addition to the standard artists and programmers.

In *Hostile Waters*, your center of operations is an "adaptive cruiser" capable of generating fifteen different types of vehicles. These vehicles include three types of helicopters, two tanks, a hovertank, a reconnaissance buggy, and a scavenger. The gameplay is split between making strategic decisions from within the carrier and operating the vehicles on the landscape. In the strategy mode, players control construction, research, and battle plans. At any point, players can take control of the vehicles to ensure the success of the mission. Subsequently, the gameplay focus switches from real-time strategy to a first-person vehicular action game with outstanding graphics.

As with the upcoming *Battlezone II* (see page 40), Rage insists that every object and every vehicle in the game rely on physics. When a tank is blown up, it doesn't just spray triangle polygons everywhere, but breaks up into individual chunks, each of which is a deformed and charred piece of the whole tank. These chunks are also ruled by physics, so they can tumble down hills or wash up on shore.

Unsigned as of yet, we're hoping Rage finds a publisher so *Hostile Waters* will wash up on our shores when it's finished early next year. NG

FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
TBA

DEVELOPER
Rage Birmingham

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2000

ORIGIN
U.K.

Rage cut its special effects teeth on *Incoming* but is now aiming for a more subtle approach

ARMY MEN AIR ATTACK

The little green men march on — and we don't mean the ones from Mars

A couple of years ago, 3DO struck gold with the launch of its *Army Men* franchise, the ongoing saga of the brave Green plastic men and their struggle against the evil Tan plastic menace. *Army Men Air Attack* pushes things in a new and promising direction: air-to-ground combat. A new character, Captain, pilots air cavalry against the Tan army, who bring in Roman candles and bottle rockets for air defense.

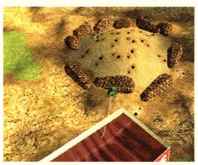
Not surprisingly, the gameplay is markedly different from previous games in the series. "The army men universe is just a fun universe to be in," says Kudo Tsunoda, senior director, "and definitely with all the *Army Men* games you can see we have really different gameplay, but still we maintain the army men theme — playing with the scale, playing with the toys — that can be universally applied to a bunch of different kinds of games."

And different, this certainly is. Three of the game's six areas are set in the "real world" — in someone's backyard, a campground, and on a playground. The choppers can grab and winch almost any object, enabling you to do things like drag a doughnut from a picnic site into the Tan fortress, which attracts ants who destroy the soldiers. Likewise, bees fly from flower to flower, and by dragging a flower into an area, the bee will follow.

"That's not something a six-year-old would do," Tsunoda explains, "but we're making it so it's simple enough for a kid, but adding that extra depth of gameplay. We have the two-player cooperative mode, trying to make a game that kids and their parents can play together, so on one-half of the screen the kid can be flying around and shooting, while the parent does the more sophisticated tactics."

The one thing you can say about the *Army Men* series is that it's always had a strong sense of groan-and-roll-your-eyes humor. Combine this with a strong graphics engine, simple controls, and oddball level designs, and you could have a winner. So far, *Air Attack* looks just like one. NG

The *Army Men* universe isn't quite like any other. How many games let you use a can of squeeze cheese as a weapon?



Caught between the Tan army and an army of ants, an intrepid chopper pilot could drag a box of fireworks to the anthill and eliminate the six-legged problem

Yup, there's a little tiny war going on in your very own backyard — kinda reminds us of childhood

The game's two-player modes include cooperative and capture the flag, but also "Tic Tac Blow" — tic-tac-toe in which you fight for the square

FORMAT
PlayStation

PUBLISHER
3DO

DEVELOPER
3DO

RELEASE DATE
Fall 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

The game's 3D engine has been built from the ground up. Expect it to support Direct3D but also run in software

Take charge of a five-man squad of highly trained officers and lead them into extremely dangerous environments

SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE

Can tight quarters in full 3D and close attention to detail revive a flagging series?

Sierra's *SWAT* series has never been a classic. The original was a horrid FMV affair, while *SWAT 2* took a shake at realtime strategy and squarely blew it. But *SWAT 3* is set to buck the trend. Moving the series into the 3D age, the game puts the player in control of a squad of five SWAT officers from a first-person perspective through 18 missions ranging from hostage rescues to serving high-risk warrants to protecting VIPs.

One parallel is obvious. "A lot of people are comparing us to *Rainbow Six*," says Producer Rod Fung, "and we're flattered by the comparison, but we're a very different game. *Rainbow Six* is a strategy game. *SWAT 3* is a game built on tactics, where each room, door, or person encountered in an environment dictates the player's next move or team command."

SWAT's interface is amazingly simple, there's no need to set up routes for the squad to follow. Instead, you control your team directly in realtime through a series of keystroke commands, each of which brings up a submenu of further choices. Tap the key for "clear room," and a submenu appears with new keystrokes for "left door," "right door," and so on. "The AI characters also react to their environment," Fung explains. "If they're executing a command but are interrupted by a suspect or hostage, they'll respond accordingly."

> **"You'll have to learn to locate and use hard cover... suspects may shoot at you through doors and walls"**
> **Rod Fung**, producer

Heightening the sense of tension is the game's unique treatment of building materials. "All of the wall surfaces have unique penetration values," says Fung. "Depending on the material's thickness and type, the firearm you are using, and the ballistics of your chosen ammunition, you can penetrate walls. You'll have to quickly learn to locate and use hard cover, or you're likely to get hit. Suspects, on the other hand, may shoot at you through doors and walls if they happen to sense you."

It doesn't hurt that the team consulted closely with Ken Thatcher, a 26-year veteran of LAPD SWAT (who also performed all the motion capture), or that members of the team attended SWAT training. Authentic? Realistic? Intuitive? You bet. We'll be watching this one. NG

FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
Sierra

DEVELOPER
Sierra Studios

RELEASE DATE
Q4 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

The game not only lets you shoot through walls, but wounded characters leave blood trails, which can either be tracked or betray your location

CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

One of the oldest series in gaming is out looking for some action

The *Might and Magic* series has had a devoted following since its debut on Apple II in 1986. And so it's come to pass that the series is poised to invade the console world, not with a port of an existing game (which has been done before, several times, with varying degrees of success), but with an installment of the game built from the ground up.

"We have to capitalize on our strengths — the fantasy world, the storytelling," explains 3DO's Scott McDaniel, "but we also want to capitalize on the strengths of the platform as well. So *Crusader* is an action game."

Crusader uses a third-person perspective, seen from the usual over-the-shoulder view. And although a great deal of effort has gone into ensuring that the game appeals to an action-hungry console audience, it still maintains the feel of a fantasy RPG. You take the part of Drake, who grew up to be a feared mercenary after his village was destroyed by an undead army. "We're not going to go campy, like Duke Nukem," McDaniel says of the character, "but he will have a lot of attitude, more of a dark hero style, like Clint Eastwood at the end of *Unforgiven*."

Instead of the usual power-ups that wear off, you pick up items such as armor and weapons. Success in battle brings experience, which can then be spent to upgrade the character's fighting or spell abilities. Like all good action heroes, Drake can jump, flip, roll, backflip, climb, and more, and each attack is different depending on the type of weapon he uses.

Drake fights some 35 different creatures, through 15 "levels" of five different environment types. "We're trying to keep it very open ended in the level design," says McDaniel, "in that we're not going to limit it to 'finish the level, move on.' There's going to be tons of quests involved. So you reach the top of the citadel, and other crusaders come through the window — it's not a cut scene, you'll join the battle — and once the battle's over, they'll tell you, 'Oh, you have to go back and rescue someone.' So you have to remember how you got in, where this person might be, then go back."

Sounds good to us. NG

FORMAT
PlayStation

PUBLISHER
3DO

DEVELOPER
3DO

RELEASE DATE
Q4 1999

ORIGIN
U.S.

The game gives different options on how best to advance your character, with "magic" being one possibility — unleash devastating special effects on your enemies!

The game's enemies are as varied as its terrain. You fight creatures both undead and breathing, in environments both inside and outside

http://www.next-generation.com

GENESIS: APERIAN 7

Massive Entertainment isn't letting resource management get in the way of its realtime strategy game — in fact, the team has cut it out entirely

When **Next Generation** met with Massive Entertainment at the 3Dfx booth at E3, we couldn't help but notice how much the game looks like a ground-based version of *Homeworld* — detailed unit designs, fantastic lighting effects, and a user-controlled camera that takes player from nose-hair close to a stadium-cam view with the drag of a mouse. Yes, it's a realtime strategy game — but as Massive's CEO and Lead Designer Martin Walfisz says, one with "a lot more focus on combat and no resource management."

Unlike *Homeworld*'s space-based missions, Massive's game is firmly rooted on the terrain of Aperian 7, a newly discovered planet 450 years in the future. "There are two factions who discovered the planet," says Walfisz. "It's Earth-like, and they want to migrate their people there. That's the basis of the conflict."

The two factions Walfisz refers to are the Crayven Corporation and the Wrath Coalition. He describes the Crayvens as "good guys, with a strong-balanced army" and the Wraths as "bad guys, religious fanatics, with more advanced technology, but not always as stable."

Of course, players can choose either side and launch into the mission-based single-player campaigns, of which there

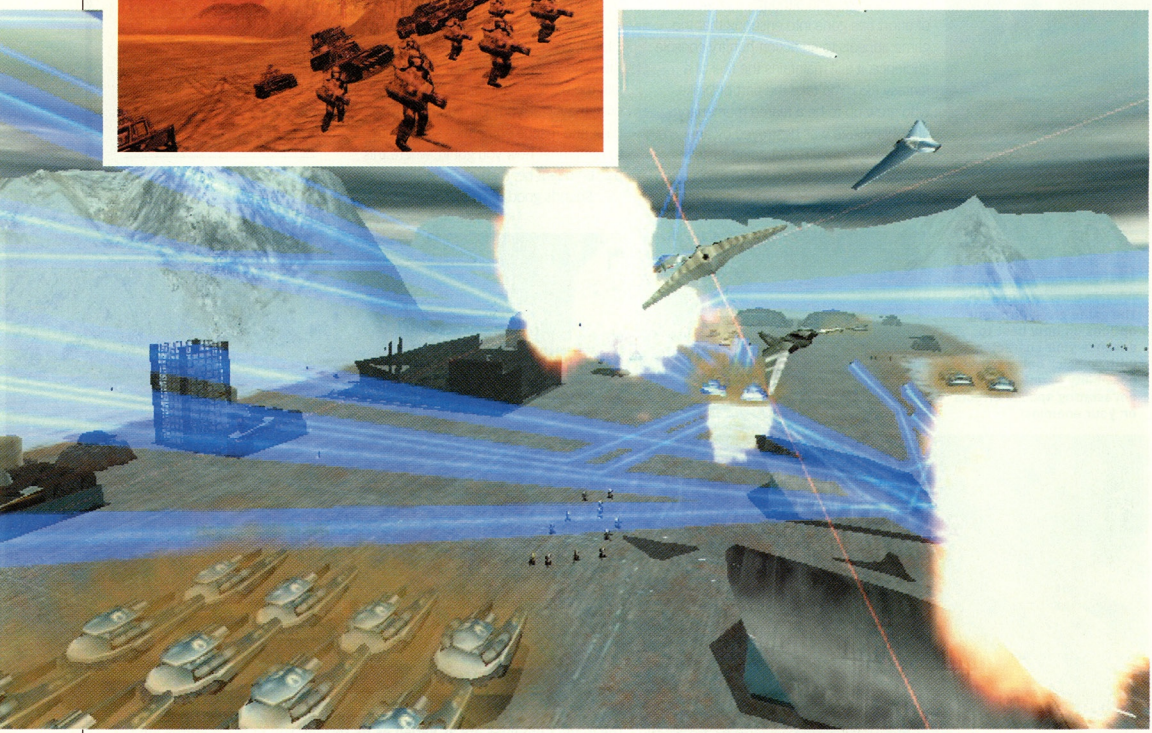
FORMAT
PC

PUBLISHER
TBA

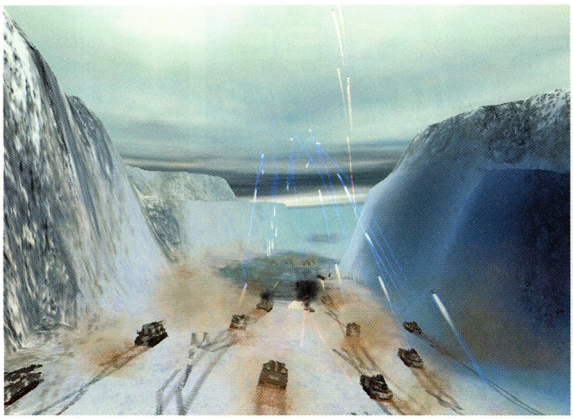
DEVELOPER
Massive Entertainment

RELEASE DATE
Fall 1999

ORIGIN
Sweden



Missions vary greatly from level to level. Some will be offensive, some defensive, and some will require stealth



The war for Aperian 7 will be planetwide, from snowy mountains to arid deserts to jungles complete with a tree canopy

Players can utilize artillery units for long-range attacks but need to be wary of the friendly-fire damage they can do to their own forward units

will be 15 unique missions for each. There are plans for up to eight-player deathmatch games, and several other multiplayer variations with what Walfisz describes as "objective-oriented goals," but he's currently keeping them secret.

Players begin the campaigns with basic Marine squads, and as the game continues, they acquire new customizable units and weapons. Each mission begins with the player loading their *Aliens*-style drop ship with the type of squads they want for the mission, then descending to the planet surface to begin the RTS part of the game. Players can control up to 12 squads at a time (players never pilot individual units), and the number of units per squad depends on the type of unit. "For example," Walfisz says, "A light tank squad is always four units, and heavy tank squad is always two units."

"I really like resource management games, but [they can take] too much time. Ours is gonna be faster"

Martin Walfisz, CEO and lead designer

The game also adds a bit of an RPG element. Each squad has a squad leader, and as Walisz says, "they will increase their skills with more experience, so you don't want to get them killed too soon."

But the two things that really make *Aperian 7* compelling are the jump-into-the-action gameplay and the painstaking detail in creating this virgin world.

"I really like resource management games, but sometimes it takes too much time," says Walfisz. "Ours is gonna be faster, much more action-oriented."

But strategy will be required, and the variety of 3D terrain certainly affects the way the game is played. Standing in shadows, for example, gives your units a better chance of going undetected, and fighting from an elevated position makes it easier to attack enemies.

"We want to create a believable environment," Walfisz says, "to keep real scale and a sense of a believable science fiction world."

Like any industry driven by creativity, the new ideas usually come from the newcomers, and Walfisz started Massive (now a 17-employee operation) two years ago with a business partner he met online. By coincidence, Walfisz and *Homeworld* creator Alex Garden met at CGDC '98, when both were publicly showing their respective games for the first time. And while they share a mutual admiration for each other's RTS titles, both will likely hit market around the same time. Add to that Activison's *Dark Reign 2*, Psygnosis' *Metal Fatigue*, Interplay's *Star Trek: New Worlds*, Westwood's *Tiberian Sun*, and LucasArts' *Force Commander*, and the field of sci-fi strategy games quickly becomes crowded and very heated. Regardless of who takes home the trophy, Massive's *Genesis: Aperian 7* should prove it can run with the big dogs. NG

Armored vehicles are more protected in the front than in the rear. Players who master flanking attacks will certainly have an advantage

Hard to imagine the jumps could get any bigger in *Rush 2049*, but somehow they do

SAN FRANCISCO RUSH 2049

Can Atari's futuristic sequel to *Rush* maintain the momentum?

The rush is back. Following *San Francisco Rush* and *San Francisco Rush: The Rock Alcatraz Edition*, *San Francisco Rush 2049* careens into arcades this fall. In this, the third incarnation of this popular street-racing series, you can spin the wheels of a futuristic concept car through a sci-fi San Francisco 50 years from now.

First and foremost, rest easy in the knowledge that *Rush 2049* retains all the elements which made hits of the first two — unparalleled driving realism, big air time, fantasy shortcuts, and over-the-top competition. Of course, Atari Games has given the game a thorough update with a new look and new gameplay elements.

Players can choose from a stable of eight new cars. (These autos of the future aren't hovercrafts, though — just sleeker designs of four-wheeled models.) There are four new driving tracks, each selectable in reverse mode for a total of eight paths through the city. *Rush*'s signature shortcuts and super stunts are available on all tracks; dynamic track elements (including futuristic updates of city trademarks like the famed cable cars and the BART train system) ensure that obstacles move and change on each lap to add extra challenge for experienced players.

Atari's sci-fi cityscape features unusually moody lighting, new ultramodern buildings, and way-out structures with multi-tiered streets and skyscrapers so tall they really do scrape the stratosphere. (If you think you've landed in a recent Bruce Willis flick,

While the majority of the city is futuristic, the 1960s hippie haven of Haight-Ashbury remains untouched by the sands of time

Packed lanes are a *Rush* staple — actually, it doesn't look that much different from the way things really are in San Francisco today

FORMAT
Arcade

PUBLISHER
Atari Games

DEVELOPER
Atari Games

RELEASE DATE
August

ORIGIN
U.S.

The game retains many classic San Fran landmarks: see Coit Tower, above

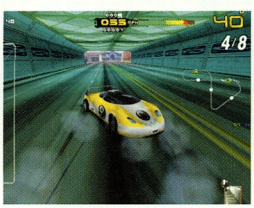
you'll know where some of the designers' inspiration came from.) As with previous versions of *Rush*, you can drive on rooftops, only now after launching your car from the tops of the skyscrapers, the jumps seem to go on forever. While the majority of the city is futuristic, the 1960s hippie haven of Haight-Ashbury remains untouched by the sands of time.

With a 60fps framerate, the game delivers an unprecedented sense of speed, packaged neatly in a deluxe new sit-down cabinet featuring a 27-inch VGA monitor, steering wheel, hand shifter, and three foot pedals (clutch, brake, and gas). The four-speed shifter works with an even more realistic working foot-clutch pedal than previous *Rush* editions, offering greater precision driving control and pickup speed through the manual transmission option. You'll also feel Atari's patented feedback-steering mechanism as you spin that steering wheel around sharp curves.

Beyond the enhanced hardware, Atari is introducing new arcade technology giving players the option to join "Team Rush" by registering their player ID. (Just enter a 10-digit PIN (phone number), then your driving handle on the 12-digit, dash-mounted keypad.) Team Rush members can keep track of their total driving miles and win prizes for high mileage. Players with high mileage will unlock hidden cars, and other new upgrade options, including new paint jobs. Players can post high scores and racing times on the *Rush* web site, and the game will remember your name and driving preferences next time you come back to play.

So will Midway (Atari's parent company) bring this latest *Rush* to a console system? "It's likely," said one Atari spokesperson, although specific systems haven't been announced. Given the game's sophisticated graphics, the networking options of Team Rush, and Midway's strong support of Dreamcast thus far, *Rush 2049* seems a natural for that system or for PSX 2. Let's hope Midway thinks so, too. NG

The standard *Rush* options return, including a variety of cars, different courses, automatic or manual transmission, several musical soundtracks, and various paint jobs



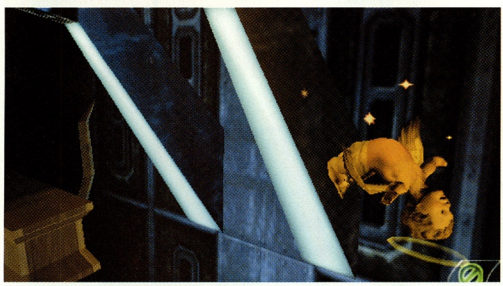
Something old, something new — alongside the classic San Francisco architecture you'll find suitably futuristic urban landscapes

MILESTONES

Next Generation's monthly update on tomorrow's games

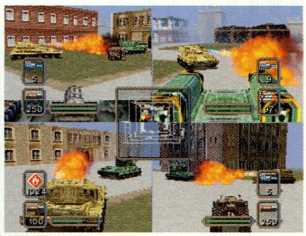
One more month until Dreamcast arrives: have you pre-ordered? Maybe you haven't — conservative shoppers are quite aware this new system arrives in the wake of a solid selection of games for the current generation. Not that some games haven't been a long time coming. Finally, Shiny's *Messiah* (first seen in **NG 33**, Sept. '97) shows signs of nearing completion...

MESSIAH PC



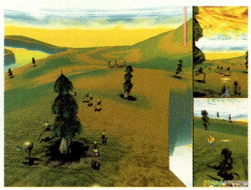
Originally scheduled for the spring of '98, and projected by Shiny's Dave Perry to deliver scalable technology to "end the polygon wars once and for all," *Messiah* is now tracking for a holiday release. As the cherub Bob, [above] players can possess upward of 50 characters and take control of their weapons as well

BATTLETANX 2 N64



3DO's follow-up to the highly successful *Battletanx* takes the armored gangs on a 20-stage spree, trashing famous global landmarks. Add in new weapons and vehicles like a hover tank, and you're set

SACRIFICE PC



Sorcerers battle one another in a fantasy realm by summoning all manner of strange creatures to beat the stuffing out of each other. Shiny's first game with multiplayer options looks like it's a cut above

EXCITEBIKE 64

Did *Excitebike* really need a 3D update? We'll have to see how it turns out...

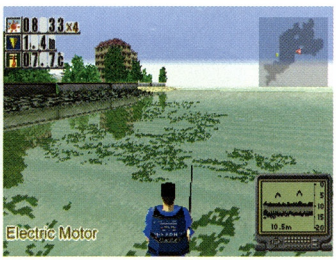
COMMAND & CONQUER

The N64 version of this classic is coming soon — need we say more?

NHL FACEOFF 2000 PSX

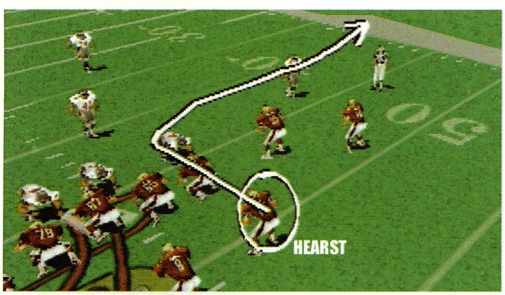
989's game adds a hat trick bonus. Score a hat trick at home, and the crowd will throw hats on the ice

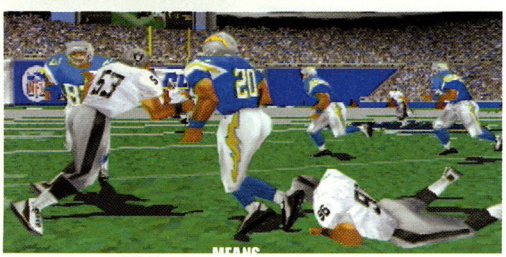
BASS LANDING PSX



We normally don't get excited about fishing games, but like Dreamcast's *Get Bass*, Agetec's *Bass Landing* comes with its own Dual Shock fishing-reel controller. The graphics will barely pass as average, but this title brings plenty of cool simulation options with it

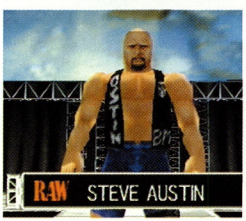
GAMEDAY 2000 PSX





GameDay 2000 brings a unique telestrator feature to the replays [top], and a throwback uniform option modeled here by the Chargers [above]

WWF N64



This isn't Acclaim's *WWF Attitude* — THQ is now showing this unnamed WWF game as Stone Cold and company move to THQ later this year

Piracy Files

An inside look at
the cutting edge
of videogame crime

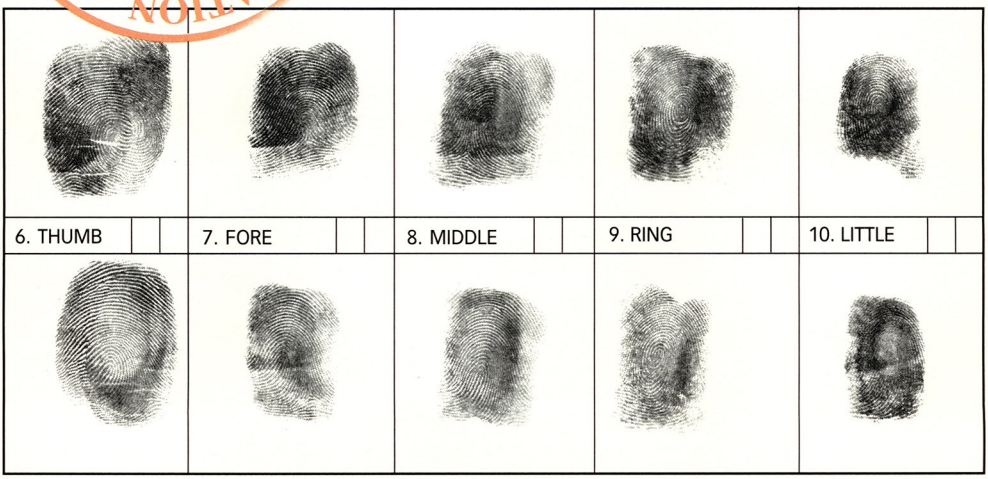
File Name: The Piracy Files	
Name: Unidentified suspect a.k.a. "PSX Cracker"	
Case #: 94450-B	**Prepared by:** Special Agent Michael Brick
Jurisdiction: Federal	**Date:** August 1999
Charge: Copyright infringement	

Comments:

CD-R burners, empty jewel cases, CD label printers: byproducts of a victimless crime, or the evidence of a federal crime punishable by $100,000 per single disc copied? A **Next Generation** investigation.

OFFICIAL CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTATION
AUG 99

Prosecuting Agent



Fingerprint Specialist

Photographic images on these pages are actual shots from the June 1998 software-piracy bust of Liam McLaughlin

Two flak-jacketed U.S. marshals combed the corridor for back exits. The team fell in behind them, taking care to keep out of sight of the peephole. The lead marshal rapped on the door.

The man they were after, Liam McLaughlin, opened it — just a crack — and the marshal slid his foot into the jamb. The team rushed in as McLaughlin shuffled his bare feet across the carpet. Evidence cluttered the floor: *Gunbolt*. *Battle Round*. *Ray Tracers*. *Madden Football '98*.

McLaughlin is exactly the kind of nobody the videogame industry is worried about. Until the raid, he was a bit player in a cast of counterfeiters and smugglers that cost game companies in the U.S. more than $3 billion last year. "Piracy is as big a contender as anybody out there," says Richard Flamm, counsel for Nintendo of America. "We look at [the market] as Sony, Sega, Nintendo, and the pirates."

Games have won legions of new fans since the introduction of PlayStation and Nintendo 64, and new technology has made stealing games even easier than playing them. A new breed of American pirates is doing just that, in numbers the industry can only guess at.

In response, game companies are pouring resources into piracy-fighting — a confusing, tedious, and sometimes dangerous proposition. Each of the three makers of videogame systems has hired in-house piracy fighters; one company even has a team of five full-time employees. Third parties like Namco, Electronic Arts, and Capcom also devote resources to piracy-fighting. Many of them turn tips over to the industry's elite team at the Interactive Digital Software Association, the game industry's trade group.

From offices in a part of Washington fashionable enough for lobbying but low-key enough for detective work, the team coordinates battle strategy. While the fight against large-scale overseas counterfeit operations in Hong Kong and Taiwan has been going on since the 8-bit days, the proliferation of small-time, domestic operations means that the piracy fight today is on unfamiliar turf. "We are still in the process of organizing the investigative and enforcement infrastructure," says Doug Lowenstein, president of the IDSA. That's to be expected. Although factories overseas are kicking out gobs of counterfeit products, American pirates are still building their theft infrastructure.

Jack-of-all-trades is a fitting résumé for a piracy fighter. The association's president began his career as a newspaper reporter. The anti-piracy team leader, a former city planner, has ten years of experience fighting counterfeiting.

Their duties range from urging foreign governments to respect intellectual-property rights to teaching police agencies how to spot counterfeit goods. In some cases, they go track down pirates themselves. The team's pursuit of McLaughlin's negligible operation sheds light on the difficulties of pirate-fighting. During the raid, he looked confused. Why would a $7 billion industry send a team of lawyers and piracy fighters out with federal officers to confiscate 236 games?

The big break finally came on June 10, when McLaughlin offered an agent a list of 149 games

Sex, Lies, and Videogames

Kathlene Karg drove past the blooming cherry blossoms on the way to headquarters on March 26, 1998. The city was aflutter with presidential scandal, and it was a big month for anonymous tips. Karg was interested in one about laracroft1@cybergal.com, whoever that was.

It took only a day after her team sent an e-mail query to find out that McLaughlin was the man behind the laracroft1 curtain. But this time he was writing from a different email address. On March 27, he offered an undercover agent five games for a total of $46. He gave the agent the address of his Manhattan apartment, requesting a money order from the post office.

Three months would go by as the agents corresponded with McLaughlin, getting a feel for the size of his operation. He didn't have a web site,

Karg's team told her one day. Should they keep on it? Tracking this new form of piracy would force her to base many calls on instinct; the team was instructed to stay the course.

Team members sent their email messages at off-business hours, away from their corporate accounts. Slowly they drew a sketch: McLaughlin kept a stockpile of games, of which he made copies on a CD burner. If they wanted other games, no problem. He would go rent them from Blockbuster Video and copy them. Soon McLaughlin started cutting deals: Buy nine at once and get the tenth free. Refer him to a friend and get a free game.

The big break finally came on June 10, when McLaughlin offered an agent a list of 149 games, all priced to move at less than $11. "I'm working on inserts folks…So now ALL games come with front and back inserts," McLaughlin wrote, effectively confessing more trademark and copyright infringement. "And CD LABELS TOO!!!"

In the scale of the piracy battle, 149 games are worth approximately nothing. But it was time for an instinct call, and it was time to move fast. McLaughlin had included a rambling 9-point disclaimer that he was only selling the games as backup copies. The tone indicated he might have been on to them.

Sixteen days and a hastily filed civil lawsuit later, Karg found herself in the hallway outside McLaughlin's apartment. The corridor was quiet as the two U.S. marshals checked for a back exit. So very quiet, in fact, that Karg could hear the clickety-clack of what sounded like someone typing inside Apartment 2U.

Her heart, already racing, sank for a moment. Typing could spell disaster for the raid she had been planning for three months. If the rest of the team had been there ten minutes earlier, the marshals would not have been waiting in the lobby, their uniforms and flak jackets drawing attention from the building's residents. Now the man behind the door was typing, she thought, hurriedly destroying the computer files she needed to seize.

A quick knock on the door, and the clicking stopped. Finally, McLaughlin answered. Her team had been chasing him in cyberspace all this time, and here he was, apologetic, clean-shaven with shoulder-length hair. Karg followed the marshals into his apartment. As they checked for surprises, she found the source of the clicking and clacking. McLaughlin had been playing *Theme Hospital* on his PlayStation.

"Patients are reminded not to die in the corridors," the television squawked as the association's attorneys explained why they were there and why they were about to take away every game disc in his apartment, legal as well as pirated. McLaughlin shut it off.

Later he would write an apology to the industry, which *Time* magazine would call "very public" while making it so. This was why the agents wanted his 236 videogames. "I wish I could tell you that persistence is going to shut down Internet piracy in the next year," says Lowenstein. "What we do is look for opportunities to set examples as a deterrent." McLaughlin was the first example, but as long as piracy continues, he won't be the last.

Why would a $7 billion industry send a team of lawyers and piracy fighters to confiscate 236 games?

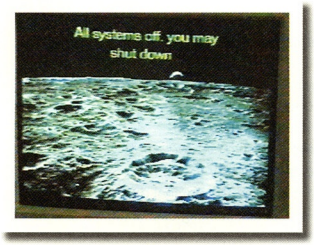
"If We Went After All of Them..."

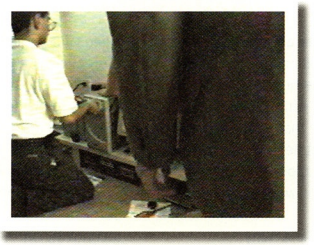
Technology that was only just becoming available when PlayStation and Nintendo 64 were designed — namely, fast Internet connections and inexpensive CD-ROM burners — has enabled piracy to move down from well-financed overseas operations to, potentially, every bedroom in America, especially the bedrooms of the tech-savvy early adopters that game companies traditionally target. "Four years ago, we were seeing a different kind of pirate," Karg says. "We send hundreds of cease-and-desist letters," adds Flamm, the Nintendo lawyer. "You're seeing different users, so you're going to see different abusers."

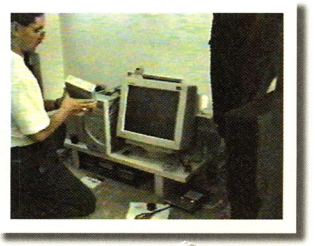
In a report to the U.S. Trade Representative due this summer, the IDSA plans to estimate domestic-piracy losses for the first time ever. Some industry officials say domestic pirates could account for close to another $1 billion in lost revenues. Estimates of lost U.S. sales range from 3 percent to 15 percent.

How do experts arrive at these numbers? "I just took a wild guess," one game company's chief piracy fighter admits. The business of chasing American pirates, for now, involves a lot of wild guessing and selective enforcement.

In the U.S., "there's not five or six bad guys you can







go after," says Kerry Hopkins, manager of intellectual-property compliance for Sony Computer Entertainment America. "There's thousands of small fries, from 15-year-old kids to 40-year-old men going into business to support their families. If we went after all of them, it would take as many people as we have in our company."

Compounding that is a prevailing attitude that videogame piracy is not a crime, or that it's a victimless one at worst. Industry officials say they feel under assault from American customers who would rather buy games from pirates than pay more than $20 extra in retail stores. The officials also think those customers resent the industry's success with technology that they think should be free. That perplexes pirate fighters. "You don't say 'Just because GM had a good year, I'm going to run out and steal a Cadillac,'" says Karg.

Partly to blame, though, is that pirate game customers don't have to run out anywhere to steal a videogame. Since companies began selling their games on compact discs, counterfeiters' jobs have only gotten easier. While copying Nintendo 64 carts is more difficult, the small size of the ROMs means that they can be downloaded in minutes from hundreds of web sites, then played via a "backup device" like Dr. 64, which can also easily be ordered online.

"You can make one investment and rip off a lot of people," says Karg. If American pirates are slow to figure that out, it is already the modus operandi for overseas groups like The Players.

Pirate fighters have documented a Singaporean system of fall guys hired to serve jail time for piracy

The Gray Market

The thermometer was creeping past 80 degrees, but it was much hotter inside the cavernous warehouse shared by China Airlines and Iberia Airlines at Miami International Airport.

Customs Inspector Philip Spataro peered into a box full of compact discs. He had played *San Fransisco Rush* on his cousin's PlayStation before, and the disk he pulled out of the box did not look the same. For starters, the printing was terrible and the disk was not in a case. Then he noticed the spot where Sony's distinctive logo merging the letters P and S belonged. In its place was a P with a basketball in the center, a design that reminded Spataro of the Indiana Pacers basketball team logo. He called his partner over for help.

The Penalties of Piracy

What are the penalties of piracy? Although they include jail time, small-time pirates selling or trading copies of games online should be more afraid of the process server knocking on their door than the FBI. Pirates figure that they are safe from copyright-infringement penalties because of the government's limited resources, but what they should be worried about is getting sued personally by the copyright holder — a strategy that more and more game publishers are pursuing.

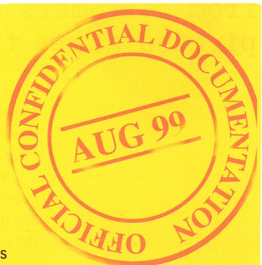
The U.S. Copyright Act gives the copyright holder damages of up to $100,000 for each count of infringement plus all costs and attorney's fees. Make ten game copies (either ten different games, or the same game ten times), and that's ten counts, with a potential civil liability of $1,000,000. And it's not just the people copying the games who need to be worried: although it isn't technically illegal to merely purchase a pirated game, knowingly running a pirated game is an infringement. Someone buying fifty pirated PlayStation games might have saved a few thousand dollars but can be sued for up to five million.

Copyright holders can (and do) also ask the courts to seize and destroy the computers and CD burners used to create pirated copies. Even if the court does not ultimately allow the equipment to be seized (and destroyed), pirates will still be without the use of their computer during the long litigation process.

Thanks to fast connection speeds, full CDs are being transferred online. Pirates who offer games for download are liable for copyright infringement. This is true even if no one ever downloads them.

What about claims that would-be pirates are safe if they force users to agree to delete games after they evaluate them for 24 hours? Or pirates who include disclaimers that they are only selling pirated games as legitimate "back-up copies"?

Sorry. As IDSA lawyers said to Liam McLaughlin just before they took away every game in his apartment (as well as his CD-ROM drive), the law just doesn't work that way — the claims have about as much weight with a judge as claiming you put cyanide in someone's coffee "for flavor."



Raymond W. Rowe *is an intellectual property lawyer practicing in Miami, Fla. For more information, go to http://www.rwrowe.com or send him email at rwrowe@abanet.org.*

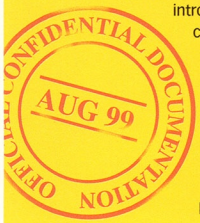
The Future of Copy Protection

Pirates may remember the late 1990s as a golden age — piracy has never been easier, and it will never be this easy again. When PlayStation was released, the high cost of CD duplicators was copy protection enough; with DVD writers already under $1,200, Sony will not make that mistake again.

Even the latest PlayStation revision is designed to thwart piracy: it will not play discs that are any color but black, so pirated golden or silver CD-R discs will not work, even with the addition of a mod chip.

What about the next generation? While a Sony spokesperson declined to comment on specific anti-piracy technologies, she said, "Obviously it's something we're planning on taking care of." Nintendo has been more explicit: it's boasted that its DVD media (produced by Matsushita) will be "counterfeit-proof."

So what are the methods that will copy-protect games in the next generation? Surprisingly, they're very similar to those used in the 1980s to protect floppy disks on Apple II and Commodore 64. Back then, a flaw was intentionally introduced on the game disk. When you copied a game to a new (unflawed) disk, it wrote over the segment that was flawed on the original disk. When you ran the game, it checked to see if anything was written on flawed area of the disk. If there was, it meant a copy was running, and the program shut itself down. SafeDisc, a division of video copy-protection giant MacroVision (80% of video DVDs released feature MacroVision's copy protection, and 100% of DVD players support it), uses a similar system to enable PC game makers to protect their discs: a digital code is embedded into the disc itself. It can be read, but not written, with conventional CD writers. So you can copy the disc, but if you try to run it, the program can tell that it isn't on the original disc. EA, Ubi Soft, GT Interactive, and others are starting to use SafeDisc technology on their PC games.



Sounds good, but "counterfeit proof?" Possibly. "You can get great copy protection," says one Nintendo developer, "if you're willing to spend money and design custom hardware." Both of which, he adds, Nintendo is. "Nintendo is saving so much money switching from carts to DVDs that they can do tons of copy protection and still save money."

The developer speculates that Nintendo Dolphin DVDs may come with multiple pinholes in the disc — the DVD equivalent of floppy-disk flaws. Putting holes in blank DVDs without warping the surface will be almost impossible (as will writing to a mutilated DVD with a standard burner), thwarting casual pirates, and Nintendo will be able to have the drive vary its RPMs as it scans the locations of the holes, creating, in essence, a code on the physical surface of the disc that only it knows how to read. Add SafeDisc-style protection as well, and it's easy to see that the days of easy piracy may be drawing to a close.

Chris Charla *is editor in chief of* **Next Generation**.

Despite the strength of American intellectual-property laws, small shipments of 15 to 20 PlayStation discs routinely pass through U.S. ports on the way to South America. The counterfeit games must be played on machines with a mod chip added, making their detection easy. Hopkins, the Sony pirate fighter, had left

The industry feels under assault from customers who'd rather buy pirated games than pay $20 extra

a regular PlayStation so customs officials could test games themselves. The *Rush* discs did not work on the unaltered machine, so the officials left a voice-mail message for Hopkins.

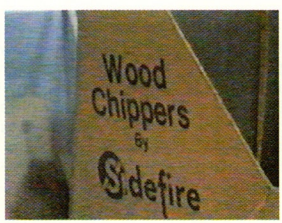
When she finally returned the call from the customs agents, Hopkins was momentarily speechless. She mustered a giggle, then repeated the number of discs seized: 39,600 — or roughly 39,400 more than she was expecting.

As counterfeit videogames become more popular, the game-smuggling business is growing as well. That fight is proving more frustrating — and dangerous — than the battle with domestic pirates. In the countries were piracy is most rampant, governments have weak patent and trademark laws coupled with little desire to enforce them.

The 28 small tan cardboard boxes from the China Airlines flight were divided in two parts; one from Sung Dazzle Enterprise Co. Ltd., of Taipei, Taiwan, the other from Pt. Multi Sarana Permai in Singapore, both destined for a distributor in Paraguay.

"You can't go after anybody criminally because it's entirely extraterritorial," says a customs agent familiar with the case. The countries that harbor pirates "view it as a U.S. problem."

Game makers counter that videogame theft is a U.S.-problem-only in that American companies are the ones bleeding money. Pirate fighters have documented



Photographic images on these pages are actual shots from the June 1998 software-piracy bust of Liam McLaughlin

a system in Singapore of fall guys hired to serve jail sentences for the counterfeiting rings. In a report to the U.S. government, the International Intellectual Property Association detailed counterfeiting efforts pairing Taiwanese and Chinese businesses. While piracy is illegal in Taiwan, police demonstrate "a recurring tendency to accept a suspected pirate exporter's denials at face value," the report said.

That leaves game makers on their own against groups like The Players, a counterfeiting and smuggling ring that uses shadow companies for shipping but places the P logo on game disks to ensure customers they are buying a first-rate knock-off.

Shortly after Agent Spataro's discovery, Sony sponsored a ceremony where the games were destroyed. That public-relations spectacle drew a pledge from the Taiwanese embassy in Washington to crack down on counterfeiters and smugglers. "If you're going to be effective at fighting pirates, you need to hit the sources of supply," says Lowenstein. So far, many foreign governments have been less than helpful.

Many in the industry contend that this is due to industrial pirates overseas keeping close ties to organized crime. While U.S. government agents laugh at the notion of smugglers swallowing Sony PlayStations in plastic bags, some anti-piracy agents say they have received death threats. One industry official cited a raid in Thailand last year where local police were shot and tied up before eventually being rescued.

The most worrisome frontier for piracy fighters lies in Internet auction houses and chat rooms, where there is often no policing, and, in effect, anything goes. It is only through months of investigation that piracy fighters can even determine whether a given web site is being run by an American college student or by an organization like The Players.

If there is a silver lining, Lowenstein says, the exploding piracy business is a measure of the legitimate industry's popularity. "There sure are a hell of a lot of people stealing our stuff," he says.

MICHAEL BRICK is a freelance investigative reporter. His work has appeared in more than a dozen newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Gazette of Montreal*, and the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. He lives in New York City. NG

The Future of Copy Protection

According to the 1999 annual consumer survey that the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) conducts, 20 percent of the most frequent users of PC games and one-quarter of the most frequent console-game users agreed with the statement that "buying counterfeit or unauthorized games is no big deal." Is it "no big deal?"

Is it "no big deal" that American computer and video game publishers lost an estimated $3.2 billion worldwide in 1998 to software piracy? Consider that with the money lost to this theft, publishers could have developed about 1,600 new games that would have given all gamers a variety of new titles to choose from.

A typical game may cost $2 million or more just to develop and millions more to market. Is it "no big deal" that piracy diverts precious dollars from the legitimate retail sales that fund the future research and development required for the next generation of games?

This practice is also a big deal to the thousands of developers who spend 18 months pouring all their creative energies and financial resources into making a cutting-edge new game, banking on the sales revenue to sustain their next project — only to see it pirated, sometimes even before it chalks up a dollar in legitimate sales.

Piracy *is* a "big deal" and the losers are not just publishers, but small developers and the tens of millions of game consumers who play by the rules.

Doug Lowenstein *is president of the Interactive Digital Software Association.*

GALLERY

The fine art of gaming

Namco's long-running string of arcade hits has so far been backed up with home conversions that are, in many respects, superior to the originals. The *Tekken* series continued to set new standards of added features with every release, but with *Soul Calibur* (**NG 55**) coming to Dreamcast, the development team is intent on pushing the graphics envelope every bit as far.

Namco's character designers and 3D artists have always been among the best in the world (who doesn't remember their jaw dropping when they first beheld *Tekken*'s breathtaking CG intro and ending movies?). *Soul Calibur* continues this tradition of excellence, with painstaking attention to detail, and characters (like Taki, pictured on the previous page) whose presence is nearly as physical as any real actor could hope for.

***Soul Calibur* art by Namco's Ryoichi Ban using Softimage, character design by Koji Mitsunaga**

Infogrames is determined to pull ahead of its driving-game rivals with this, the rich-in-potential *V-Rally 2*, which provides challenging terrain over 92 tracks in 12 international locations. To achieve the highly realistic look of the Peugeot 206 World Rally Series car in this render, the image contains more than a million polygons, 100Mb of textures, and was rendered up to 6,000x6,000 pixels.

Image rendered by **DigiMania Limited**, a member of Digital Animations Group plc, using Lightwave 3D

A flagship PC game series **gets a new lease on life,** while PlayStation is **graced with offbeat goodness**

FINALS

Professional reviews by learned gamers

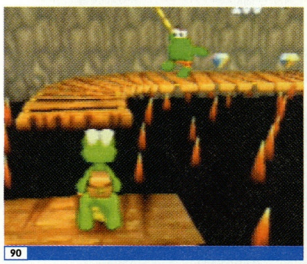
85 **Ape Escape** PlayStation
'Cause catching monkeys is just funny

86 **Descent 3** PC
A classic just keeps getting better

Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest	Nintendo 64	**90**
Bloody Roar 2	PlayStation	**90**
Croc 2	PlayStation	**90**
Warzone 2100	PlayStation	**91**
Alexi Lalas Soccer	PlayStation	**91**
GTA: London 1969	PlayStation	**91**
Expendable	PC	**92**
Imperialism II	PC	**92**
Jane's Fleet Command	PC	**92**
Midtown Madness	PC	**93**
Rich Diamond	PC	**93**
Ultimate 8 Ball	PC	**93**

86

85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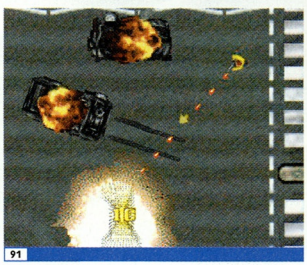
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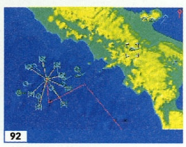
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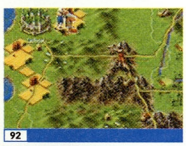
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Next Generation's reviews have gotten bigger and better, and leaner and meaner at the same time. How's the new format working for everyone? Love it? Hate it? Need something more? Let us know.

★★★★★
Revolutionary
Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high watermark.

★★★★
Excellent
A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★
Good
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★
Average
Perhaps competent — certainly uninspired.

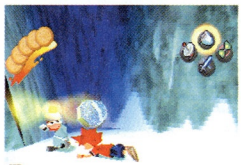
★
Bad
Crucially flawed in design or application.

Denotes a review of a Japanese product.

Monkeys, time travel, and a big net —
we ask you, **what's not to like** about this game?

APE ESCAPE

Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **SCEI**



The included mini-games are far from being mere filler; they are plenty of fun on their own

We were looking forward to *Ape Escape* from the minute we heard it was about escaped monkeys with red flashing police lights on their heads, and we're happy to report that the gameplay more than matches this awesome premise. *Ape Escape* has all the charm of *Spyro the Dragon*, but it's far more compelling and imaginative, possessing that irresistible Japanese quirkiness to boot.

The story is that the escaped monkey Specter, who has stolen an intelligence-increasing Peak Point Helmet from a professor's lab, is leading a band of minions with similar hats through the professor's time machine. It could be *Planet of the Apes* all over again, but armed with various ingenious gadgets, it's up to the player to put the world back to rights.

As the character Spike, players travel through time, tearing across the landscape and snatching up monkeys with a net. Those helmets actually have a function: when monkeys are oblivious to Spike's presence, their helmets are a serene blue. When they're in a tizzy, the lights flash red and could mean big trouble — especially when their wearers are toting machine guns or driving tanks.

The monkey radar gadget provides short bios of monkeys in close range, so players can plan an attack

Monkeys and mammoths collide in the Ice Age, forming a formidable opponent indeed. You'll need the right gadget to catch this little guy

Other monkey-catching gadgets are doled out by the professor and his granddaughter Natalie as levels are completed. With each new gadget comes a training session, ensuring that players aren't overwhelmed by all the controls when they begin. Mailboxes scattered through the levels parcel out quick hints as well.

What makes the game unique is that it requires an analog controller (Dual Shock recommended) and fully integrates the controller's features into gameplay. Capturing monkeys is all the more satisfying as the controller vibrates excitedly, but more importantly, control is very precise. For example, tilting the left stick slightly makes Spike walk; moving it all the way makes him run; pressing the stick down makes him crouch; and pushing forward makes him crawl. Rotating the analog sticks can row the oars of a boat or rotate the propeller of the flying gadget. Pulling back the right stick and letting go simulates operating a slingshot. Even with all this variation, the controls are far better than most games of this type.

These fantastic enhancements to players' "weapons" keep gameplay challenging and fun and add tremendous gameplay value, as do the varied 25 basic levels, three boss levels, and one secret level. From the stark snowscapes of the Ice Age to the bizarre innards of a huge turtle called Dexter, boredom never enters into the picture.

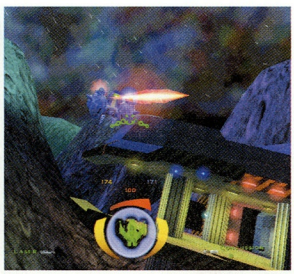
Frankly, we couldn't stop playing. The game is extended with several mini-games, as well as timed racing, skiing, swimming, and boxing, and players can revisit lands as they collect new gadgets to capture previously inaccessible monkeys.

Ape Escape manages to appeal to a very broad range of players. Its general light-hearted cuteness makes it ideal for younger players, but its originality and challenge will also appeal to the most jaded hardcore players. A terrific game.

RATING ★★★★★

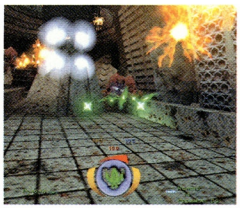
It's the best of the old, **the most promising** of the new, and a **solid test of mettle** — here's a sequel **worthy of its heritage**

DESCENT 3



Think you know *Descent*? Think again — *Descent 3*'s most instantly distinguishable new feature is that missions now include both outdoor as well as indoor areas. The fact that it handles both with equal aplomb is impressive indeed

Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Outrage Entertainment**



Naturally, the game supports the latest in 3D technology and comes chock-full of cool lighting effects and eyecatching explosive goodies

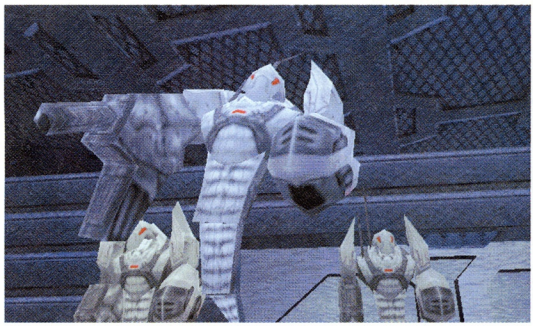
It's been four long years since the *Descent* revolution. Now, the team that pioneered such "outrageous" features as 3D accelerator cards, competent AI, and Internet multiplayer via Kali is back in business.

But it's also been three eventful years in established action-gaming territory since the team's last stroke upon the gaming easel. Admittedly, the designers need to impress an audience that's been spoiled by *Half-Life*. In the wake of this challenge, Outrage certainly had its work cut out for it.

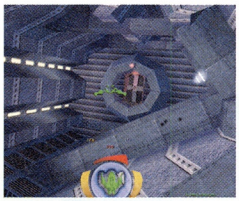
Fortunately, *Descent*'s wildcard of 1995 remains a crowning achievement — the ability to control your ship forward and backward, up and down, sideways — heck, even bank-ways. It's a complicated skill to acquire, but the flexibility of movement is worth the time spent learning it. It's this intricate gameplay element that's hooked such a devoted online community. And they're all wondering just how the cliffhanger ending from *Descent 2* has been continued.

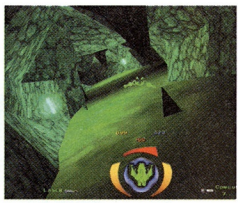
Turns out, following the warp-core malfunction at the end of *Descent 2*, your derelict Pyro-GX craft was rescued by an undercover rebel contingent that needs your help collecting proof that the PTMC has been deliberately spawning the same hell-bent machinations they hired you to destroy in the previous two episodes. As a result, the missions have entirely new objectives. In a twist of irony, rather than have you perforate a helpless reactor, *Descent 3* pits you in a frantic race to save a helpless reactor from a horde of overwhelming forces.

The proprietary Fusion engine handles indoor and outdoor environments acceptably, but it still takes a lot of hardware to get this tuna to fly — 128MB of RAM would be ideal. In favor of quality over quantity this time around, the level count has been reduced to 15 levels. This sounds limited, but each level is expansive and vastly different from the next. One will have you wandering through the



The enemy AI that the series is known for is pushed to even more devious extremes. The word "lethal" hardly seems adequate





Exciting as the newly added outdoor environments may be, the faithful can still expect more of the twisting, vertigo-inducing flights down every corridor and shaft of the planet's interior as well

streets of a futuristic Japanese city. Another will have you combing the ruins of a deserted Martian civilization. Look carefully and you'll witness transparent ghosts marching along the floor. This is but one of boundless small touches in the consistently awe-inspiring level architecture. And this time, the automap is a much better navigational tool for those who get lost.

Of course, these locations aren't just there for peaceful ambiance. There's a whole new cast of adversaries. Most are entirely new, such as the chameleon "Old Scratch" whose slash attacks will wrench weapons loose. Others are familiar, like the thief bot — only now, the thief is craftier, hiding its stolen goods in an obscure hideaway cache. You may later take vengeance upon the vandal, but you'll still have to find its treasure hold.

The one thing that *Descent 3* offers that other entries in the series never really did (thanks to everything being indoors) is a variety of environments

The guidebot is more involved this time, but we found it annoyingly prone to disobedience and running in front of your targets. Fortunately, you can keep the incessant mongrel caged inside your ship — or let it run loose and use it for target practice.

Not only are these robots varied, they're blessed with the formidable AI that has always been the bread and butter of the *Descent* series. Each one displays a distinct personality and demands a variety of tactics. Finding yourself surrounded by several different species of these malevolent monsters is a recipe for sheer, deadly pandemonium.

The incessant competition can become a frustration at times, and it seems the design team has realized this. Unlike before, upon any number of deaths you'll simply be respawned, similar to the method previously seen in multiplayer cooperative mode. This eliminates the necessity for the "creep and save" and avoids otherwise long load times. New pilots will nonetheless have a steep learning curve to climb, and will probably want to invest in a good joystick. Despite these issues, an involved community of fans representing a wide spectrum of skill levels are already pouring into Parallax Online for free Internet multiplayer.

And here's where things are most enticing of all. *Descent 3* has fathomless depths of multiplayer potential. Nine modes and 15 more multiplayer levels are included out of the box. And if the past is any measure, third-party levels will likely eclipse even the originals in popularity. Weapon balance has been modified wisely. Smart missiles travel slower, megas are still powerful but don't track as well, and none of the new weapons disrupt the balance. Each weapon yields unique advantages; there's no dominating "rocket launcher" to speak of. It all adds up to one of the most thrilling multiplayer experiences available.

Finding yourself surrounded by several different species of malevolent monsters is a recipe for sheer, deadly pandemonium

Although *Descent 3* is a sequel by definition, it feels as original as any newcomer, while at the same time remaining faithful to the premise and strengths of its predecessors. Outrage has made our job simple. It doesn't get much better than this.

RATING ★★★★★

Heaven help you if you get stuck in a room full of bots — the action is fast and furious, and *Descent* amateurs need not apply

CROC 2

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Fox Interactive
Developer: Argonaut

Shigeru Miyamoto won't lose any sleep over it, but *Croc 2* is still one of the better 3D platform games to come along. That's a pleasant surprise, given the aggressive mediocrity of the original.

Argonaut's sequel is a bigger, more varied beast, with mine-cart levels, boat races, and balloon rides. There are more than 40 non-linear levels, many packed with mini-games and return trips for extra gems and goodies, and each path leads Croc one step closer to defeating the pernicious Baron Dante. *Croc 2* is impressive in size, and gamers will have to put in serious time to finish it.

Argonaut wrings special effects with craft and care from the aging PlayStation hardware, and the 3D landscapes are not only huge, they're textured in a cute, cartoon style that's consistent to the end. But it must be said: *Croc 2* is so insufferably adorable that although it nails the 12-and-under market, it may leave the 13-and-above crowd giggling at its short, stubby characters, simplistic graphics, and nonsensical language. Like *Banjo-Kazooie*, the gibberish is good fun for about ten minutes — after that it's time to look for the mute button.

Two problems *Croc 2* has going against it are occasional annoying camera angles and slightly loose control. If you turn around in tight, narrow passages, Croc can only run into the camera; what's more, we wish that when Croc stopped, he halted on a dime, not on a silver dollar.

Despite this, *Croc 2* is one of the better 3D platformers on PlayStation, if just by a claw.

RATING ★★★★☆

***Croc 2* lets you once again save the pathetically cute Gobbis**

KEN GRIFFEY JR.'S SLUGFEST

Platform: Nintendo 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Angel Studios

If you can learn how to hit the ball, *Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest* makes baseball seem fun

The latest in the *Ken Griffey Jr.* series, *Slugfest* takes the arcade feel of the franchise to wonderful new levels. It has all the modes of play (exhibition, season, home run derby, and World Series) that we take for granted in contemporary baseball games, as well as an excellent create-a-player mode.

Graphically, *Slugfest* is clean but uninspired. The stadiums are decently rendered, offering a real sense of depth, but the players are of the cookie-cutter variety, offering little to distinguish them from each other except for skin tone. Still, what they lack in beauty they make up for with a wide variety of expressive animations.

When it comes to gameplay, *Slugfest* eliminates the bug-ridden fielding problems that have plagued the series and offers the player hardcore arcade thrills. Impossibly high scores and cartoon-like sound effects create an atmosphere of goofy fun that's a refreshing change from the stark realism of so many baseball titles this year.

Still, while *Slugfest* is definitely more an arcade experience than a simulation, it's also an incredible challenge. With no difficulty setting in the season mode, playing as the World Champion NY Yankees is hardly going to stop you from getting shut out by Detroit. The pitches zip over the plate, and the on-screen display of where the pitch is headed is only there for a moment before the throw. After that, you have to follow the actual ball, work on your timing, and pray.

The best place to work on the batting basics is the home run derby, and this time-honored feature has rarely been done better than *Slugfest*. Everything the game does right shines through here: screaming fans and fireworks accompany 500-foot-plus home runs that smash against scoreboards and disappear over walls.

This is the one of the best arcade baseball titles in a while. Sure, the graphics pale in comparison to Acclaim's *All-Star Baseball 2000*, and realism is notably absent, but if you're more concerned about white knuckled multiplayer games and .500 batting averages than pitching duels and squeeze plays, this is your game.

RATING ★★★★☆

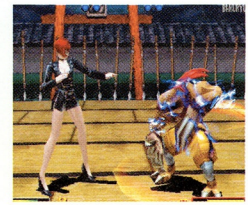
BLOODY ROAR 2

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Hudson Soft

Making a successful 3D fighting game on PlayStation is a daunting task indeed. The system is absolutely awash with excellent titles from Namco, Capcom, and even Square. Luckily for us, Hudson and Sony are up to the task with *Bloody Roar 2*. Like the first *Bloody Roar*, the sequel stars a cast of nine martial-arts experts with the unique ability to morph into a variety of different animals. Along with a life bar, every combatant has a "rave meter" that fills up at varying speeds depending on how much damage the fighter inflicts or absorbs. When the rave meter starts to flash, you can change into an animal. Each character has an animal alter ego that makes them faster and stronger than in their human form. It's a welcome addition to the fighting genre, to say the least. Not only does morphing open up a whole new set of moves, but it adds a whole new element of strategy to the combat. Morphing at the right time can easily make the difference between winning and losing, and smart players will quickly learn to use it wisely.

Hudson has really beefed up the in-game features, too. Aside from the regular one-on-one fighting and survival modes, *Bloody Roar 2* also features an amusing story mode, an edit mode where you can change the look and physics of the fighters, and an interesting secret mode that allows you to create and link your own combos and attacks.

Unfortunately, there were also some changes made to the balance of the fighters. Many of the fighters in the sequel seem terribly powerful in comparison to others, especially in the hands of expert players. Some characters have really excellent linking attacks and combos, and others don't. After some play time, we noticed that we were picking the same few fighters over and over again because we knew their attacks were better than the rest. A greater boost to the weaker characters would have been a welcome addition.



***Bloody Roar 2* is the surprisingly good follow-up to a surpisingly good original**

In the end, however, *Bloody Roar 2* is a visually pretty and fun-to-play fighting game with just enough to set it apart from the rest of the "me too" titles. Despite the minor balancing issues, there is a whole lot to like.

RATING ★★★☆☆

WARZONE 2100

Platform: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**
Developer: **Pumpkin Studios**

As a strategy game for PC, *Warzone 2100* is a four-star diversion, but the console version falls far short of even that goal.

Both versions are notable for their attempts to inject new life into the RTS mold. The most interesting feature of the game is easily the "create-a-unit" option. Unlike other strategy games, you don't research individual units. Instead you research components, which can then be mixed and matched to form units. With over 2,000 possible combinations, there are plenty of options.

Another unique feature of the game is the persistence of the world. Moving from mission to mission doesn't necessarily mean starting from scratch. The player's base and units stay intact, giving the player an advantage. *Warzone 2100* provides a viable reason to protect your base, as it now becomes foolish to sacrifice it for the sake of a single mission.

Despite these unique features, however, *Warzone 2100* remains a barely average console title due to a poor controller interface; although it's nearly identical to that of the PC version, it works poorly with a console pad, creating much initial frustration.

If you're willing to sit for a few hours and learn the intricacies of playing with a standard controller (or if you're one of the two people who own a PlayStation mouse), *Warzone 2100* can be an enjoyable game. Otherwise, stick to the PC version. The two play almost exactly the same, except that the mouse is standard on PC.

As it is, *Warzone 2100* for PlayStation is practically the definition of shuffleware.

***Warzone 2100*: further proof that PlayStation needs more than just a straight PC port**

RATING ★★☆☆☆

ALEXI LALAS INTL. SOCCER

Platform: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive**
Developer: **Z-Axis**

The last time soccer star Alexi Lalas attached his name to a sports title, it was a silly arcade game for PC called *Red Hot Soccer.* This time around, though, he's got it right. If you're looking for speedy, no-nonsense physical play, you could do a lot worse than *Alexi Lalas International Soccer.*

On some levels, this flies in the face of some stiff PlayStation competition, including *FIFA '99* and even *World Cup '98,* but the game still holds its own. A manageable interface enables smooth control for some 70 soccer clubs based on classic international teams. You'll get all the necessary gameplay goodies like passing and precise shooting, sudden death overtime, and penalty-kick shootouts.

You can play friendly matches or dive into tournament play, and you can also customize your teams with ease. The team-management function allows you to pick your team and opponent, change formations and positions to suit your attack, and swap players either before the game or during play.

You get some slick graphics, too. Six different cameras follow the play, utilizing some 250 motion-captured movements provided by American star Eric Wynalda. Most of the action is seen from a side-scrolling overhead camera, but spectacular moves and goals get full camera treatment in replays.

***Alexi Lalas International Soccer* gets by mostly on personality, but it's worth a look**

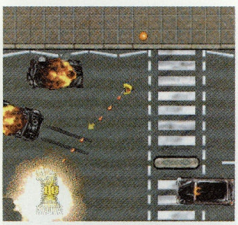
The main drawback (if you're slow to pick up defensive codes) is the way opposing teams gloat when they score a goal on you. Dancing and high-fiving is a staple of almost all sports. But these animated hot dogs take it to extremes and all but rub your nose in it.

Then again, that may encourage you to learn faster, play harder and rack up some "In your face!" get-even time. Then you can rub someone else's nose in it.

RATING ★★★☆☆

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LONDON 1969

Platform: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Rockstar**
Developer: **Take 2**



It's not exactly "shagadelic," but *Grand Theft Auto: London 1969* is still a decent romp through a life of crime — sure, it's morally reprehensible, but at least you have a reasonably good time

That bad boy of PC and console is back. Remember *Grand Theft Auto,* the rollicking king of digital misbehavior? Its casual approach to larceny, hit-and-run, drive-by shootings, and general mayhem raised disapproving eyebrows in the press and sent parental temperatures soaring.

Now we have *Grand Theft Auto: London 1969,* the first mission pack ever for PlayStation, which is news in itself — though not necessarily welcome news if you don't have the original *GTA* in your personal game library. If you don't though, you still have a few options. Keep reading.

Although set in swinging, bell-bottom-and-suede-era London, the premise is roughly the same as in the original. You're a low-grade hood, trying to fight your way to the top of London's criminal food chain. You'll trot from phone to phone for assignments, steal cars, accumulate weapons, shoot it out with mob enemies, and elude police. As you scale the depths of gangsterdom, you'll break the law in just about every way imaginable.

A top-down map offers three big London levels and 33 distinct missions. The music is cool and the Brit ambiance fun, although the game is a bit short. Even with all the nefarious assignments (including some that are hidden), it doesn't take that long to work your way to the end — two or three days at most and it's over.

Worse, as a mission pack it requires the older *GTA* to run. If you have the original, an add-on may seem an excellent idea. You'll get fresh activity and a new criminal reputation for a very low price. But if you don't have the earlier game, you'd be better off buying *Grand Theft Auto: Director's Cut* (also from Rockstar), which includes both the original and the London mission pack in one case.

Either way though, *GTA: London 1969* is an enjoyable, if short lived, romp on the seamier side of the hippie-era Brit night life.

RATING ★★★☆☆

JANE'S FLEET COMMAND

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts/ Jane's Combat Simulations**
Developer: **Sonalysts**

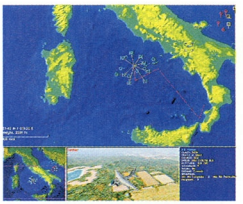
The Jane's Combat people have a high-flying reputation for sticking to realism and accuracy. This time, however, they've added 3D eye candy to *Fleet Command*, a real-time naval strategy game.

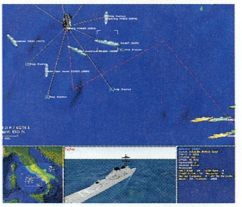
The realism is still intact. *Jane's Fleet Command* puts you in control of a flotilla of modern fighting ships. You'll send submarines skulking into enemy waters, dispatch helicopters, launch fighters from carriers, and fire an arsenal of deadly missiles. They're all accurately designed and based on actual performance. If a real-life frigate is slow, your frigate is slow. If a real cruiser is armed to the teeth, so is yours. Each plane has its fuel-based range. Go beyond it, and you'll never get home. One would expect no less from Jane's.

It's a complicated game, but the controls are remarkably easy to master. Four tutorials teach you the interface, the intricacies of air combat, surface operations, and how to use your carriers. In no time, you're ready to go to war. The rigorous combat situations are hypothetical but drawn from today's headlines (and in a bit of "truth is stranger than fiction," network news shows used it once as a visual aid during a U.S. bombing raid on Iraq).

Pace is a problem. Naval engagements typically occur over great distances, and it takes time to place your fleet and close on the enemy. That's where the 3D comes into play. The game screen has a large 2D map at the top, and a smaller regional map, 3D window, and data display at the bottom. But a key tap swaps the 3D and 2D displays, giving you an oversized view of unfolding action.

So if the game turns slow and your ship is in no immediate danger, hook onto a Harpoon or a Sidewinder and follow the streaking missile to its target. You'll get some satisfying kabooms.





Jane's simulations are some of the best around, and *Fleet Command* is no exception

RATING ★★★★☆

IMPERIALISM II

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Strategic Simulations**
Developer: **Frog City**

A game that was pretty good to start with (and has its cadre of devotees) gets even better with the sequel, *Imperialism II*

If you like building empires through exploration, trade, diplomacy, conquest, and old-fashioned financial chicanery, *Imperialism II* is the only way to go.

Hot on the heels of the successful SSI original, this turn-based sequel may remind you of other strategy games like *Civilization* and *Age of Empires*, but it has its own unique charm. There are the usual tasks like building roads, managing resources, manipulating political alliances, and repelling foreign invasions on the European homefront, but you'll also do your best to explore and conquer the Americas so you can bring home rare minerals and luxury products like sugar, furs, and tobacco to keep your population happy.

The New World is the added dimension in this wicked Machiavellian exercise. The original *Imperialism* was set in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the European states pretty well established. *Imperialism II* goes back to an earlier time, with untold riches and plunder lying across a dark sea, waiting to be plucked by the first daring seafarers to reach them.

Strategy is, of course, the backbone of the game. But *Imperialism II* demands more than just outproducing and outgunning your neighbors. You also need trade skills, transportation sense, and military know-how to build and feed your industrial force, dispatch sailing ships, and in general do your damnedest to outmaneuver other powers on the diplomatic front.

The graphics are fairly simple, with only a few animations to liven the scenery. But the interface has been simplified (it's much easier to pull up order screens in this version than in the original), and the artificial intelligence is a lot smarter. Best of all, the fog-shrouded New World, with its trusting tribes and waiting riches, makes *Imperialism II* a whole new ball game.

In fact, it's proof positive that turn-based strategy is far from dead.

RATING ★★★★☆

EXPENDABLE

Platform: **PC**
Publisher: **Rage Software**
Developer: **Rage Games**

One of Rage's previous PC efforts, *Incoming*, was a brilliant demonstration of what could be accomplished with the latest 3D technology, yet it suffered criticism that its gameplay was shallow and repetitive. Those criticisms could certainly be leveled at *Expendable*, a better, but still limited, title.

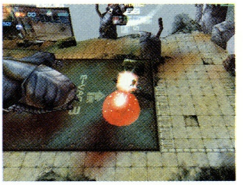
The gameplay borrows ideas from a number of classic and contemporary shoot-'em-ups. The designers confess the design was influenced by titles like Capcom's classic *Commando* and SNK's early effort, *Ikari Warriors*. Naturally, the gameplay has been updated to involve extra weapons and plenty of graphical flare. The player guides a lone warrior through scrolling hazard-filled terrain, destroying anything in his way.

The main character is a genetically engineered soldier and is introduced in a remarkably (if incongruously amusing) rendered movie. After that it's auto-fire on, brain off, as you force your way into levels so pyrotechnically overdone that it's often difficult to track the progress of your soldier — the same problem that affected ASC's *One*.

There are some frills and features in *Expendable* that provide added value. A two player cooperative mode is fun (although it does make things even more cluttered) and bump-mapping is used to good effect on suitably equipped PCs. Environments, while visually similar, switch from indoor to outdoor smoothly.

All in all, a smart little shooter, but one with limited appeal in the PC market. A forthcoming Dreamcast version may be a better fit.

RATING ★★★☆☆



***Expendable* doesn't exactly live down to its title — it's decent enough if you turn off your brain**

MIDTOWN MADNESS

Platform: PC
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Angel Studios

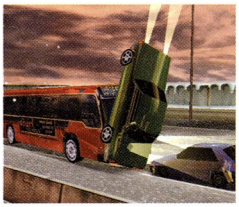
Midtown Madness is more than just another pedal-to-the-metal tribute to modern road rage. It's a harrowing exercise in manic high-speed racing competition through extraordinarily crowded streets.

Chicago is the real star of this arcade racer. You get miles of free-ranging city streets. You can follow marked courses or just go cruising. All the familiar landmarks are there, from Wrigley Field in the north to Chinatown, Soldier Field, and the Adler Planetarium in the south.

Wherever you go, you'll do it at top speed. Races include quick checkpoint sprints, longer circuit races with laps over charted courses, and all-out blitz races. Most of the later levels are locked. As a beginner, you must finish in the top three in at least three races to move on. Sign on as a pro, and only wins will work.

Selection of vehicles is pretty wild, as well. You get the usual mix of Mustangs, GTRs, Caddies, and roadsters — but you also get sturdy pickup trucks, city buses, and 18-wheeler semis, guaranteed to bust through traffic.

The sound is solid — nice music, the crunch of metal, screeching sirens as the local fuzz try to catch you, and snotty spectators shouting insults when your driving turns erratic. More impressive are the accelerated graphics. Random movements are thoroughly detailed, from cars hurtling in front of you to cringing pedestrians when you lurch onto sidewalks. Buzz by O'Hare airport and you'll even see planes take off and land.



Shades of *The Blues Brothers — Midtown Madness* lets you scream through the streets of Chicago at 120mph

Midtown Madness may not be a groundbreaking racing game, but it'll stay on your hard drive for a while and keep you playing.

RATING ★★★★☆

ULTIMATE 8 BALL

Platform: PC
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Mirage

In an age where deer hunting, fishing, and bowling games seem nearly ubiquitous, it seems strange that pool has taken such a back seat. If there's a sport that "American guys" can really sink their teeth into, then it has to be pool. THQ's latest iteration of the game seems almost ridiculously comprehensive.

First things first: the graphics, which include fully rendered 3D players, would look pretty good in the latest Id title, never mind a billiards simulation. The table renders are also beautiful, and ball animation is perfect (if your machine can handle it).

There are 14 different games to choose from, including U.S. and British 8 Ball (it was developed by the U.K. company Mirage), standard 9 Ball and some slightly more obscure variations including Cut Throat, TenPin, 10 Ball, and Rotation. There are initially 15 opponents to choose from, each with a distinct visual and pool style — however, they all seem to be pretty tough. This game gets hard very quickly in one-player mode. There are fifteen table shapes and sizes, too, giving you something to complain about when you miss an easy plant.

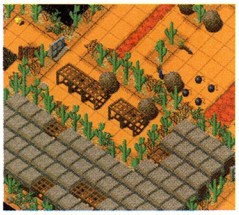
Although the single player modes are varied and attractive, the multi (two, to be precise) player options are even more engrossing. The game can be played on a LAN or via the Internet, and the nature of the game means that LAN lag and even modem speed are hardly an issue. All of which amounts to an absorbing and ultimately impressive pool title — making the most of a simple concept.

RATING ★★★★☆

We have to admit, everything that *Ultimate 8 Ball* does, it does pretty well

RICH DIAMOND

Platform: Nintendo 64
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Core Concepts



If you like weak puzzle games, then boy, is *Rich Diamond* right up your alley — and may God have mercy on your soul

Described by developer Core Concepts as a "logical problem-solving game with an exciting action/adventure feel," *Rich Diamond* is actually a puzzle game wherein you play the role of a treasure hunter who must relentlessly pursue his beloved diamonds through eighty-plus levels full of monsters, arrows, ice, and huge rolling boulders. The game is played from a top-down perspective using either the mouse or the arrow keys, moving Rich Diamond one square at a time in one of the four primary directions. The object is to move pieces of the environment in the right sequences to reach the elusive diamonds. In an interesting wrinkle, instead of having to take the levels in order, they're presented in groups that can be tackled in any order, but which all must be completed before you can move on to the next group.

Unfortunately, whatever the developer may claim, there's no action or adventure to be found in *Rich Diamond* beyond its meager attempt at a story and the fact that the motif happens to be of the Indiana Jones type — the objects in the game could have just as well been ray guns and Martians and it would have been the exact same game. The puzzle aspect is strong if a bit predictable; the levels have customizable backgrounds (desert, dungeon, jungle, or random) that break up the monotony; and a few of the puzzles are clever, although none are ever exactly brain twisting.

Rich Diamond has a pleasant feel and a sticker price under thirty dollars: reason enough, perhaps, for some to give it a glance. However, considering how many better puzzle games there are out there (often costing even less), the rest of us don't think it's much of a bargain.

RATING ★★☆☆☆

ENDING

Next Generation, a link to **the past**

Retroview

by **Steven Kent**, author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames

QUESTION

Treasure's *Contra* clone for Genesis, which pushed the system to heights it never saw again

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO?

Lords of Conquest

Based on a board game, this turn-based strategy title from EA featured four-player-simultaneous play, a la *M.U.L.E*, and may have been the first game to enable you to create your own play maps

ACCOLADE vs. SEGA Part II

On April 3, 1992, Judge Barbara Caulfield ruled in favor of Sega in a lawsuit against Accolade and ordered the small software maker to stop manufacturing, distributing, and developing Genesis-compatible products. At first glance, Judge Caulfield's decision seemed in harmony with the outcome of another infringement case that had recently concluded. The other case involved unauthorized NES cartridges being manufactured by Atari Games under the Tengen label. Nintendo had prevailed, but there were other circumstances involved. Atari had obtained plans for NES lockout security by falsely claiming they needed it for a court case to the Copyright Office. Accolade reverse engineered Genesis on its own. This form of reverse engineering was protected by the Fair Use Doctrine, which defined how products could be examined and used.

Accolade appealed Judge Caulfield's decision, and the case went to Stephen Reinhardt of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on July 20, 1992. (Reinhardt was the judge who presided over the Roe v. Wade abortion rights trial.) In his handling of this case, Judge Reinhardt demonstrated a clear-minded perception of the issues at hand and a broad understanding of the Fair Use Doctrine, which was the legal premise that was the underpinning of Accolade's case.

The question is whether the computer manufacturer may enjoin competing cartridge manufacturers from gaining access to its computers through the use of the code on the ground that such use will result in the display of a false trademark. Again, our holding is based on the public policies underlying the statue. We hold that when there is no other method of access to the computer that is known or readily available to rival cartridge manufacturers, the use of the initialization code does not violate the Act even though that use triggers a misleading trademark display.

Judge Reinhardt

Reinhardt noted that the TMSS file, which contained somewhere between 20 and 25 bytes of data, was miniscule when compared to the 500,000 to 1,500,000 bytes of data contained in the entire game. The data in the games, according to Reinhardt, was overwhelmingly original and deserved to compete in a free market. This, he felt, was to the benefit of the public.

Sega's attorneys defended the original decision by pointing out that their client had invested time and capital designing and manufacturing Genesis. Even after Genesis shipped, Sega continued spending millions of dollars marketing it. They characterized Accolade as a "free rider" benefiting from time and investment. Reinhardt dismissed this argument, however, as the "'sweat of the brow' rationale for copyright protection." Just as Judge Caulfield said that Accolade took a risk in adding the TMSS code and could be excused by claiming it did not know that using the code would result in a trademark abuse, Judge Reinhardt now held Sega responsible for attaching its trademark to an unlicensed game.

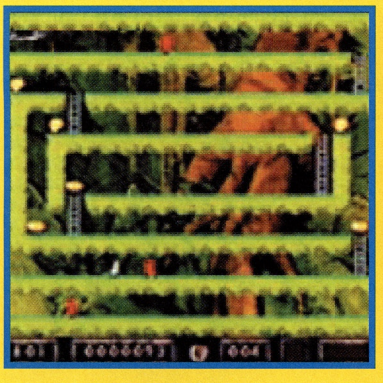
Sega knowingly risked two significant consequences: the false labeling of some competitors' products and the discouraging of other competitors from manufacturing Genesis-compatible games. Under the Latham Act, the former conduct, at least, is clearly unlawful.

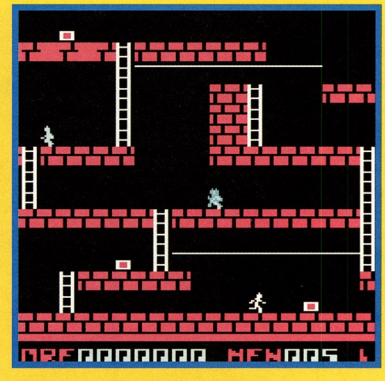
Judge Reinhardt

Sega v. Accolade has been cited in nearly every videogame trial involving reverse engineering since 1993

Without completely absolving Accolade of all wrongdoing, Judge Reinhardt struck down Judge Caulfield's injunctions. The immediate ramifications of Judge Reinhardt's rulings were short-lived. Within a year of the trial, Accolade was an official Sega licensee. The long-term ramifications of the case were significant, however. Sega Enterprises v. Accolade has been sited in nearly every videogame trial involving reverse engineering and unlicensed products since 1993, and will almost inevitably be mentioned in Sony's upcoming cases against Connectix and Bleem.

Relode





The original *Lode Runner* [right] had amazingly advanced graphics: look how many virtual sprites the Apple II could display. The PlayStation update [left], published by Natsume, continued the winning gameplay tradition

Anyone who owned a personal computer in the early '80s will likely recall a clever puzzle and action game titled *Lode Runner*. Few know, however, that this was the debut game from a University of Washington student named Douglas Smith.

In the summer of 1982, Smith wrote *Donkey Dung* on a mainframe VAX 11780 computer while working in the University's computer center. In lieu of graphics, Smith used the available character set, casting the dollar sign as the protagonist and the paragraph marks as enemies. He had no intention of marketing the project, which he created just for the fun of it.

When his nephew expressed an interest in playing the game at home, however, Smith spent three days rewriting the game for the Apple II. And on a whim, Smith submitted the game, under the name *Miner*, to software publisher Broderbund. The response was as prompt as it was hopeless: He received a one-line rejection letter that same week. Little did Smith know that Broderbund's president, Doug Carlson, was out of the office with a broken leg. His secretary, in an effort to keep his desk clear, was summarily rejecting all submissions.

Smith's hopes were bruised, but at the urging of a local Computerland employee who loved and believed in the game, he persevered. His next step was to borrow a thousand bucks to purchase a color monitor, a joystick, and some development software that enabled him to add color graphics and joystick support to the game.

He then re-submitted the game to Broderbund as well as three other Apple II software publishers: Sierra, Synergistic, and Sirrus. Within three days, he had eager offers from all four companies.

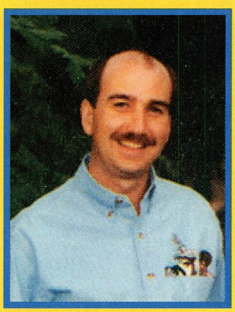
Since Broderbund was more of a known quantity to Smith than the other companies were, he chose it as the game's publisher. Broderbund's major suggestion for the game was a name change. Because the name *Miner* was so similar to another computer game, *Miner 2049er*, Broderbund renamed the game *Lode Runner*.

From December to June, Smith created the final Apple II version of *Lode Runner*. The first copy of *Lode Runner* shipped June 23, 1983. Since that time, *Lode Runner* and its sequels have been ported to 15 computer and game platforms and sold more than three million copies worldwide.

Surprisingly, Smith didn't follow up the game with more titles: between 1983 and 1990, he became a full-time ski bum and disassociated himself from the game industry.

But in 1990, Smith "got sucked back in" and ended up working at a string of companies: Distinctive Software, Square Soft, Microprose, and EA. Recently he guided Big Bang software's development of *Lode Runner 3D*, published by Infogrames for Nintendo 64. NG

On a whim Smith submitted the game, under the name *Miner*, to software publisher Brøderbund



Douglas Smith, the man who started the *Lode Runner* dynasty while still a student at the University of Washington

ANSWER

Gunstar Heroes

Letters

Write in the center of things

I've heard two rumors about Dreamcast. The first was that it would launch with *Sega Rally 2*. The other said that there would be a "Dreamcast Magazine" simultaneously launching with the system that would have a demo disc every month (sort of like what your magazine used to have) but was strictly Dreamcast stuff. Can you clarify these?

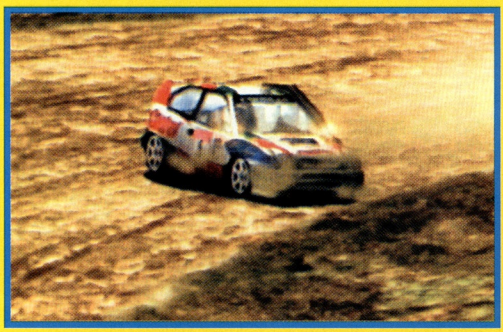
Ariel A. Ventura
acedaman@att.net

Yes, and yes. *Sega Rally 2* will be available shortly after the U.S. launch, and there will be a Dreamcast magazine. In fact, **Next Generation** alum Simon Cox is the editor in chief, joined by Advanced Strategies guru Francesca Reyes. It will be published by Imagine Media on a bimonthly schedule. And it will include a demo disc.

I read **NG 54**'s article about Dreamcast vs. PlayStation 2 and there was something you said that, now that I think of it, I have to say sounds completely wrong. In your assessment of PlayStation 2's "weaknesses" you contend that because it is backward-compatible with PlayStation 1, it will be tougher for new software to stand out. Wouldn't backward compatibility only help it? It's because of backward compatibility I know I'm going to buy one. The real reason I think it will work is because the PC has been doing this forever, but that doesn't stop people from buying the best, newest software. It just means that people don't have to eventually throw out all their old games like a lot of people do. I mean even now you can buy $10 games, but what do you save your money for? You save it for the new $50 game that everybody says is great.

Josh Boutte
goku_112@yahoo.com

A better analogy than PC, where hardware performance increases every day, is Game Boy Color. While the color version is clearly superior to the monochrome one, many publishers are still insisting that developers make games that are compatible with both, and it is tough for color-exclusive titles to stand out on shelves — the boxes look the same, so why pay $40 for this one when another costs only $15? For informed consumers (like the readers of this magazine), this isn't a big deal, but for the vast majority of game buyers — the mass market — it could be, which would be a serious problem for publishers.



Sega Rally 2* will be out shortly after Dreamcast's launch this fall; you can read all about it in Imagine's own *Official US Dreamcast Magazine

Looking over the videogame rating system the last time I was in Wal-Mart, I noticed there was an Adults Only rating, but I've never seen any game rated Adult, only Mature. *Are* there any games rated Adult?

Tim Herschbach
Grove, OK

Believe it or not, there are a few titles that carry the ESRB "Adults Only," or A-O rating, which seems to be reserved exclusively for products containing "Strong Sexual Content." Probably for this reason, you're not likely to find them at Wal-Mart or any other large chain, like CompUSA, for example — they categorically refuse to carry titles with that rating. In fact, a couple of years back when *Phantasmagoria II: A Puzzle of Flesh* (which included scenes in a bondage club and a brief topless shot) was threatened with an A-O rating, Sierra declined to have the ESRB rate the game at all, instead putting their own "17+" stickers on the shrinkwrap just so major outlets would stock it (not that this helped — the game still stunk, and it bombed).

Actually, of the ten (count 'em: *ten*) titles which have submitted to the ESRB's A-O rating, most of them are called things like *All Nude Nikki*, and only one, Black Dragon's *Rianna Rouge*, can even really be classified as a game (and even in that case, it's a stretch). Fact is, most of the titles that could be rated A-O are made by folks who probably don't care the ESRB exists and don't plan on hawking their wares in places where games are sold anyway.

Sierra's *Phantasmagoria II: A Puzzle of Flesh* dodged the ESRB's "Adults Only" rating and made it into CompUSA — it didn't help

On pages 60–61 of **NG 54**, there's an ad for the "TiltPak" N64 controller. There's a middle-aged man playing a game on N64, and the controller isn't even plugged into the first-player slot, which is an obvious goof, but what game is that he's playing? I don't know of any space mecha game for N64 other than *Star Fox*, and that's not *Star Fox*. It's not a Japanese game, because the box is an American one, and the lettering is too blurry to read. It looks *so* cool, anime-style mecha on the N64... drool...

Jonathan D Ma
jonjonm@juno.com

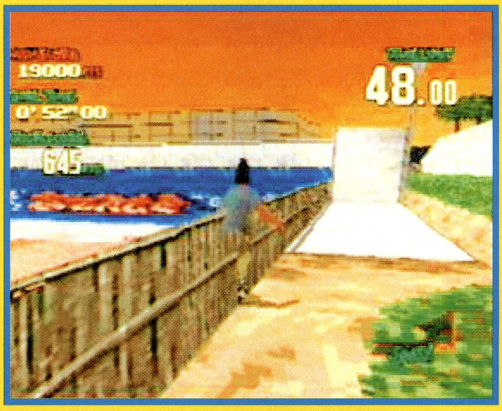
Actually, there's no reason to be excited whatsoever — the game in the ad doesn't really exist. It's just a composite of a few CG elements put together by the company that made the ad. According to a source at Pelican Accessories, using an actual game

image would have meant paying somebody for it, so they faked it. Now, please put your saliva back where it belongs.

In your review of *Street Sk8ter* you mentioned *Skate or Die* as being released on Atari 7800. As far as I can remember (from many enjoyable hours playing it) this game was released on NES, not on Atari 7800.

John Anderson
usurper_31@hotmail.com

You are indeed correct, sir. The reviewer in question (who was possibly confused by thinking of *Super Skateboardin'* for Atari 7800 — a truly loathsome title easily on par with *Street Sk8ter*) has been locked in the basement with a grue and no light. We're sure he'll feel really bad, if he lives.



For the record: *Street Sk8ter* (pictured above) bears no resemblance to *Skate or Die* — the 8-bit classic played much better

I'd just like to say a few words about media hype and how it effects games and gaming systems in the industry. As the average idiot can tell you, it can either boost support for a system or totally kill it. What bothers me is all the hype about Sega Dreamcast. Just stop it and let the system prove for itself that it is the best on the market. I've been quite annoyed at all the attention you've given the system, and quite frankly, I could give a rat's ass. It's not even out yet. If Sega wants me to buy one, they should let the games and the system speak for themselves and not rely on the hype you and the various ads that I've seen generate.

Let me give you an example of how hype affected me. After many anticipated months of the release of *Zelda 64*, I was excited when the game finally came out, and I brought my reserved copy home. After a week, I finished it and I was sorely disappointed. *Ocarina of Time* was just a version of *A Link To The Past* with a facelift. All the news reports, advertising, reviews, and other media nonsense that pointed out that this was going to be a great game were far from the truth. It was so totally unoriginal, and I was a sucker for buying into the hype.

So please let Dreamcast stand on its own. If it is the great system you claim it to be, it will impress me without the hype, and I will purchase it. Sorry if I offended anyone. It's just something to think about.

Ricky Brantley
Lynn Haven, FL

As long as Dreamcast continues to showcase great titles like Namco's *Soul Calibur*, we'll feel free to report about it

For the record, Ricky, Dreamcast *is* out, and has been for some time in Japan, and it's fair game for evaluating. We at **Next Generation** have never deliberately "hyped" anything. We happen to like Dreamcast and many of its games, and as a new system it bears as much coverage as we can give it (as will PlayStation 2 and Nintendo's Dolphin, in their time) — we're called ***Next* Generation** for a reason. And if you're in the habit of letting things build up in your mind until the reality can't possibly satisfy you, we can't help you there. NG

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